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LILLIE, THE RECKLESS RIDER.

BY MAJOR H. B. STODDARD, Ex-Scout.



LILLIE,

THE RECKLESS RIDER;

OR,

The Wild Hunter's Secret.

BY MAJ. H. B. STODDARD, EX-SCOUT,
AUTHOR OF "NECK-TIE NED," "PONY, THE
COWBOY," "RAPIER RAPHAEL," "THE
BOY VIGILANTES," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A QUARREL AND A FIGHT.

THE subject of this life-sketch was born in Bloomington, Illinois, in 1861, and little of interest happened during his school-days until he arrived at the age of sixteen, when, just before he graduated from the High School, an incident occurred which changed the whole course of his life.

Gordon Lillie was a youth of unusual brilliancy and quickness of memory, and these qualities made him an exceptionally bright scholar, so that he readily acquired lessons in a few minutes which it took others hours to commit to memory.

Besides this he was a perfect model of boyish beauty and his fair hair, blue eyes and almost feminine delicacy of complexion made him a great favorite with those scholars that belonged to the weaker sex as well as with his teachers: for he combined with his good looks a gentleness and courtesy of manner that won the hearts of nearly all those with whom he came in contact.

But there was one member of his class, who, jealous of Gordon's popularity and chafing beneath the thought that this stripling who was so far inferior to him in strength, should be esteemed his superior in all other accomplishments, seized every opportunity to insult and to mock and scoff at the lad.

His taunts at length became unendurable, and one day when Big Ben, as the boy was called had gone further than usual, Gordon Lillie suddenly turned upon him as they were leaving the school-house together, and said:

"Ben Wilson, I'm tired of your bullying, and it's got to stop."

"Got to, has it?" sneered the bully, confident in his superior years and strength. "And who'll make me stop?"

"I will!"

"You, you baby!"

"Yes, I. And to prove it, take that!"

"That," was a sounding slap from Lillie's right hand which suddenly struck the other's cheek with a resounding smack, before he could parry the blow, and left a deep red mark where the palm had irritated the skin and flesh.

With a growl of rage Big Ben drew himself together to leap on the frail lad who thus defied him and crush him to the ground beneath a hail of blows; but the sight of the principal of the school, who at that moment came around the corner, deterred him.

"Just wait until to-morrow, you young milk-sop, and I'll fix you!" muttered the elder, as, mad with pain and rage and mortification—for a half-dozen of the boys had witnessed his discomfiture—he bottled up his anger as best he could and slunk away.

"I'll be at 'The Hole' to-morrow afternoon," called out Gordon, naming a favorite swimming place much affected by the boys in the summer, for here was an eddy, and the water, shallow above and below, just at this spot was some twenty feet deep.

The other nodded that he understood and the little group separated, most of the boys following Wilson, to whom they wished to toady; for, although they disliked, yet they feared, him.

But two of the lads remained with Lillie, and walked slowly home with him, talking of what had happened and while praising his pluck, advising him to keep out of Big Ben's way.

"You'd better look out for him, Gordon," cautioned, one of his friends. "He never's been licked and he's had lots o' fights."

"Never's a long time, J m," laconically answered Gordon, "and if he never has been that is no sign that he never will be."

"Well, good luck. I'd like to see bully Ben taken down a peg."

And having reached his home the three separated, Gordon entering the house and telling the boys good-night, they promising to be at "The Hole" on the succeeding afternoon.

The boy kept his own counsel and his parents suspected nothing as he quietly ate his supper, chatting with them on various subjects, and taking his books, when the table was cleared away, and applying himself to preparing his lessons for the next day.

This task finished, he said a quiet good-night, and retiring to his room, he was soon in bed, where he quickly fell asleep and slumbered as quietly as if no such person as Big Ben were in existence.

Up early the next day, by the time the morning meal was prepared he had performed the dozen little tasks he had allotted himself, and then, after a hearty meal, slung his books over his shoulder and started for school, reaching which he found, from sundry nods and whispers interchanged between the boys, that the affair had been confided to several of them, and that a goodly crowd would visit the arena to witness the combat that afternoon.

He also saw Big Ben; but no words passed between them, as the bell rung at that moment and they all flocked into the school-room.

And when the classes were called up, Gordon only added to Wilson's wrath by answering questions which the other missed, so that by the time recess came Lillie was at the head of his class, while Ben Wilson had gradually slipped down near the foot, where he stood, nursing his wrath and biting his nails until the blood came.

At length twelve o'clock struck, and the boys were free for the day, for it was Saturday and a half-holiday, and the boys bounded out of the school-house with shouts and whistles, rejoicing in their freedom.

Gordon was detained for a moment by the principal, who praised him for his excellent preparation, and spoke a few kindly words which

made the boy's heart glow with pride and pleasure, and then, linking his arm in the lad's, walked with him until nearly home, their roads lying in the same direction.

But, as they separated, and Gordon turned off toward his home, he came upon a crowd of his schoolmates, among whom was Big Ben.

As he came within hearing, he caught the words that a little boy spoke, who was not more than twelve years old:

"Gordon isn't a coward, and I don't believe, Ben Wilson, that he told Mr. Evans" (the teacher) "a thing. He is no more coward than you are, you big bully."

And with clinched hands and flushed face the little champion confronted the other.

But he cruelly raised his hand and struck the little fellow a crushing blow on the head, while even his intimates cried "shame!"

Gordon hastened up and spoke to them:

"You know, boys, that I am no tell-tale, and that I wouldn't say a word to any one about anything that had taken place.

"As for you, Ben Wilson, I'll be at 'The Hole' at three o'clock and we'll see who is the coward!"

And he wended his way homeward where he ate his dinner and then with some excuse for his absence, left the house and set out for the place of meeting, which was some two miles distant out in the country.

On his way he was joined by Jim Davis, one of his particular friends, who exhibited with great pride a sponge, a bottle of vinegar and an empty bottle which, he explained, was to hold water.

"I'm to be your second, Gord, an' 'll sponge you off in great shape.

"We'll have a regular prize-fight, an' I reckon Ru Callender 'll second Ben."

"All right, Jim," returned the boy cheerily, and they hurried along the path, Davis giving Gordon much useful or useless advice regarding the strategy he should display in the combat.

"Keep a-peggin' away at his ribs, Gord, an' try an' get out o' the way of his rushes.

"If he ever hits you fair you're a gone sucker; but if you wind him there's no tellin'."

In a few moments more they had reached the ground and found it occupied by twenty or more of the boys.

The turf was level and "The Hole," a few feet distant, was covered with ice, not thick enough to sustain a person, but sufficiently strong to make it difficult for any one to get out if they broke through.

A few trees scattered here and there bore amid their branches a dozen of the smaller boys who had climbed up to secure a full and uninterrupted view of the fight.

The preliminaries were soon arranged, and as the boys insisted on a fair, stand-up fight, a would-be sporting youth was armed with the authority of referee, while Big Ben and Gordon promised faithfully that when either was down no blows were to be struck, and at the call of "time" advanced and shook hands.

And as they stood there the difference in the two was remarkable: Gordon with his slight limbs and white skin, seeming almost effeminate, yet beneath the velvet covering lurked

muscles and sinews of steel, the result of careful habits and thorough exercise; but the massive limbs of Big Ben stood out in cruel contrast, although his skin had a pasty look from overfeeding and much drinking of beer.

As they stood sparring, Wilson suddenly rushed upon his young opponent, aiming a sledge-hammer blow full at his face, but Lillie leaped lightly aside and, avoiding the rush, sent his right hand into Ben's lower ribs with a sound like the beating of a drum and lanced his left with full force before the other could stop or turn, and catching him full behind the ear, sent him staggering over the turf until he measured his length on the ground.

A chorus of cheers greeted this knock-down, and Gordon retired to his corner, smiling, while Big Ben was assisted to his feet and led to a seat on his second's knee, where the lump behind his ear, now the size of a pigeon's egg, was bathed by Reuben Callender, while Ben gazed at his antagonist as if he would annihilate him.

In a few moments "time" was again called, and this round was decidedly in favor of Wilson, for hurling himself upon Gordon before the latter could get out of the way, he struck him on the cheek just below the eye, knocking him far off his feet and following it up with a vicious upper cut under the chin, which made the boy's teeth rattle, and sent him sprawling into his corner before Gordon could strike a blow.

It was all that Jim Davis could do to restore him to consciousness, and when he again advanced to meet his antagonist he was decidedly light-headed and groggy on his pins, yet, smiling and confident, for his indomitable pluck stood him in good stead and the severe punishment he had received only served to make him more cautious.

Following Jim Davis's advice, he kept well away from Ben until he saw an opening, when, rushing under the bully's guard, he planted one, two, three stinging blows in his face and, as Wilson staggered back, gathered all of his strength into one well-directed blow, which caught him full in the mouth and knocked him backward over the bank, whence he crashed through the thin ice and disappeared beneath the dark waters of "The Hole," while a cry went up from Jim Davis:

"Heavens! Gordon you have stunned him, and he will drown!"

CHAPTER II.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

FOR a few moments the boys stood awe-stricken by this sudden and unexpected termination of the fray, while it seemed as if it were to be a fatal one; and not the least startled of the crowd was Gordon Lillie, who was horrified at the thought that he had thus sent a human being to eternity.

But in a second more he recovered himself, and leaping to the bank he threw his hands far above his head, and springing into the air, plunged head-foremost into the opening where Wilson had disappeared, and dove deep down into the icy-cold waters.

Down, down he went, until he came nearly to the bottom, when with wide open eyes he saw, close to the bank, a dark object which he knew must be Wilson's body, and grasping, he endeavored to draw it to the surface; but the drowning lad's hand had clutched an outstretched root, and his grasp on it was like iron, so fiercely does a drowning person clutch at anything he may feel.

Gordon pulled, and tugged and wrenched with all his might, while his chest felt as if weighted down with tons of lead, his temples throbbed and his veins swelled as if they would burst from the effort to hold his breath.

Just as he was about to give up in despair and release his hold to save his own life, while he gave a mighty wrench at the boy's arm, the root parted, and taking a fresh clutch on Wilson's collar, he gave a push with his feet and shot up toward the surface.

But the slowly swirling waters of the eddy had carried them under the ice and far away from the place where they had plunged in, and as he rose his head encountered the ice which was thicker just here, there being scarcely any perceptible current.

For a moment his heart failed him, as his strength was almost gone and his lungs would no longer remain inactive; but with a last despairing effort he drove his hand upward, and although he cut and bruised it, the ice yielded and his head rose above the surface of the water, where a few deep inspirations restored his breath, and he was enabled, with but little exertion, owing to the thickness of the glassy surface, to support both himself and his companion, who remained insensible and apparently dead.

And their situation was still a desperate one, for it seemed impossible for him to break his way through the ice until he reached the shore, while there was not a fence anywhere near from which rails could be obtained which could be pushed across the frozen surface to his aid.

And all this time the cold was creeping through his bones and bathed in the icy water his limbs were becoming numb, his muscles were growing stiff and powerless and it seemed as if he could not sustain the exertion of supporting himself and his burden much longer, while as he supported himself with one arm, stretched out over the ice, the treacherous surface kept crashing and breaking, often letting him down until he was entirely submerged beneath the cold fluid that surrounded him.

But in a short time, just as he was about to give up, a man, seated in a wagon, came driving across the field toward where the boys were assembled, gazing at the tragedy which was being enacted before their eyes, and shouting cries of encouragement to Gordon to keep up a little longer.

Jim Davis had seen the vehicle being driven along the road a short distance off and running as rapidly as he could toward it, had pantingly shouted to the driver:

"There's a boy drowning in 'The Hole'; come quick."

Arriving at the bank the man leaped from his seat and, as the boys clustered about him, pointing out the little group framed in the ice, he

hastily ordered them to loosen the reins, while he sprang to the rear of the wagon and lifted the tail-board out.

This was fastened to one end of the lines by a staple in one end, which held it in its place, and two or three comforters, hastily taken from the boys' necks being tied to the reins the tail-board was sent spinning over the ice in the direction of Gordon, and slid up close to him so that he could easily grasp it.

Resting on the board for a moment to regain his strength, he then, by a wonderful exertion, lifted Wilson out of the water, bearing on the plank which distributed his weight and sustained him, and laying him on it, at full length, face downward, he shouted to those on shore to "pull away."

And in obedience to his words the tail-board slid slowly along the ice until it neared the shore, when a dozen hands grasped the unconscious boy and lifted him up onto the ground.

Then the driver of the vehicle took the board in his hand once more and again sent it sliding over the ice toward Gordon, who, relieved of the weight of Wilson's body, found it much easier to support himself, being able to use both hands.

But as the board neared him and he partially raised himself to grasp it as it came within reach, a cry of horror broke from the little crowd gathered on the bank, for the board, striking an obstruction in the shape of a morsel of rough ice and turning, flew far from him, while the knot which held the lines came undone, allowing the board to slide over to the opposite side where it lay out of his reach.

Again and again did they endeavor to reach him with the end of the leather reins, but without avail, for the lines were new and stiff and without a weight at their end to keep them straight curled and twisted so that they would not reach, while the boys hunted far and near for a stone or some heavy article which they could fasten to the end of the lines and thus reach Gordon who was perishing from cold before their eyes.

And suddenly a cry of horror rose to their lips, for Lillie, calling out a few words which they could not catch as they issued from his blue lips, threw up his hands with a despairing cry, and disappeared from their sight.

And they stood staring at the spot where he had sunk until they abandoned all hope of ever seeing him alive again, when they, wrapping Ben in all of the over and under-coats they could muster, started to return to the city to obtain aid to recover the body of their much-beloved friend and comrade, the insensible boy being laid in the wagon and carefully driven over the frozen ground by the driver, who could not cease blaming himself for not more carefully attaching the lines to the tail-board.

They soon reached the road along which the vehicle was traveling when Jim Davis had seen it, and turned off to the right in the direction of the town.

As they moved slowly along, all talking at once, and discussing the late occurrences—which had happened in much less time than has been necessary to describe them—in all their various aspects, they were startled almost out

of their wits by hearing a familiar voice call out behind them in chattering tones:

"Say, some of you fellows lend me a coat; I'm 'most frozen!"

And turning they saw Gordon Lillie hurrying toward them as rapidly as his almost frozen and stiffened legs would let him.

In a moment more they were assured that it was indeed their friend in the flesh and not in the spirit, and warm were the hand-shakes he received, and many the expressions of thankfulness that he was alive and safe; while he was quickly wrapped up and seated by the driver, who pulled the horse-blanket he carried over his knees and then broke out:

"Say, Gord, how did you get out?"

"We thought you was a gone coon when we saw you throw up your hands and sink."

"You said somethin' we couldn't hear and come to the conclusion it was yer last words."

"Well, Dick, I was pretty well played out, I tell you, and knew I couldn't hold up much longer."

"I saw that you fellows couldn't reach me with the lines, so come to the conclusion that I had better make a break for myself."

"Seems to me you was a-makin' a break; breakin' the ice, anyhow," and the driver chuckled at his joke, which he thought excellent.

"Well," continued Gordon, as the boys clustered around the wagon to listen, "I knew that the water got mighty shallow below where I was, twenty or thirty feet or so, and that the current was pretty strong, so that the ice couldn't be very thick, so I thought I'd try for it before I was clean winded."

"I hardly remember what I yelled to you fellows; but I was so cold I could hardly speak."

"Get up!" interrupted the driver, at the mention of cold, for Gordon's teeth were still chattering; and the horse starting off at a brisk trot, the disgusted boys were left far behind, while Gordon continued:

"So I took a deep breath, went under and kicked and struck out like a good fellow, heading down stream for the ripples."

"B-r-r-r! but it was cold!"

"It wasn't long till I struck the shallows around the bend, behind the trees, and there I got footing, and stood up without any trouble."

"You couldn't see me on account of the trees, but I heard the wagon rattling, and, wading to the other shore, struck down the bank, crossed the bridge, and here I am."

"An' right glad we all are to see you!" broke in the good-natured driver, with whom Gordon was a great favorite, as indeed he was with all who knew him.

"I hated fearful to face yer pa with the news of your bein' drowned, an' didn't know what to do."

"But here we are," so skip out an' see if Dr. Trevitt is in; Ben, here, needs him bad."

Fortunately the doctor was in and shortly had Ben stripped and laid on a lounge in his back office, which was well-heated by a small stove, the warmth of which was very welcome to Gordon.

For a long time he labored with Ben, Gordon

watching him with intense anxiety, for he would be partially responsible for the boy's death if he did not recover, and eventually his patience was rewarded, for Ben opened his eyes, gave a deep groan and began to breathe naturally.

Then Gordon, putting on some dry clothes brought by the good-natured driver, jumped into the wagon, was driven home and was soon warmly covered up in bed, where he quickly fell into a deep slumber from which he awakened completely refreshed, although he was not allowed to leave his couch until the following Monday.

On going to school he learned that Ben would not be out for several days, and found that by all, teachers, boys and girls, he was regarded as a perfect hero.

CHAPTER III.

THE GREAT MATCH.

GORDON received the many congratulations showered upon him with much modesty, and avoided as much as possible talking about his adventure; yet he had to relate it over and over again to various interested crowds, who seemed never to tire of listening to him.

In the evening he went around to see Ben, and found him confined to his bed, and still very weak; but he was glad to see Gordon, begged his forgiveness for all of his unkindness and thanked him again and again for his kindness and daring in thus risking his life, so that they parted the best friends in the world.

At home he was made much of and when it was understood that the quarrel was not of his seeking he was not blamed.

"Never seek a quarrel, Gordon," said his father; "but if it is forced on you don't back down."

"Fight as long as you have a bit of strength left, if your cause is just—the greatest coward is he who is forever quarreling and always seeking trouble."

"It takes a brave man to say 'No!'"

And the Christmas holidays came, the winter passed away, and Gordon, faithful in his attendance at the High School, won high praises from his teachers, and continued a favorite with all of his companions.

At length spring came, and the day was rapidly approaching when Gordon was to graduate.

From bitter enemies he and Ben Wilson had become the staunchest friends, being constantly together and the closest possible chums in all their sports and pastimes.

They both excelled in athletics, and when the warm weather came and the High-School boys began to play base-ball, Gordon was elected captain of the nine and the selection of the players left entirely to him.

Many were the consultations that took place and long and deep were the confabs, as he and Ben discussed the merits of this and that player who were thought of sufficient strength to form one of the "Nine."

Ben was to catch, while Gordon was to pitch—that was soon settled, and at length the number of players was complete and the boys be-

gan to practice assiduously in the long evenings after school.

And soon the important announcement was made that the Bloomington Club had challenged the High School to a friendly game, and, the challenge being accepted, the excitement reached fever-heat, while as the all-important day drew near the anxiety regarding the weather was almost insupportable.

At all hours when there was light to see and they had leisure to devote to it, the two chums occupied themselves in practicing; Gordon trying the "in-and-out curve," the "up-and-down" and the slow twisters, while Ben carefully studied his signals until, at length, they understood each other, thoroughly.

And finally the day came and every boy in the city, at peep of dawn, leaped from his bed and ran to the window to take a look at the weather; and great was the rejoicing when they beheld the fair sky overhead, scarce flecked, here and there with an occasional cloud.

It is to be feared that little attention was paid to their lessons by the scholars that morning and that when the dinner-hour came their throats were too choked with excitement to allow any of them to eat very much, and then how the time did lag! It almost seemed as if every clock and watch in the city were an hour, at least, too slow, and the possessors of time-pieces were driven almost wild by the ever-recurring question:

"Please, sir, what time is it?"

And long before the hour set—three o'clock—the grounds were crowded, and balls were flying about from hand to hand like hail-stones.

All of the High School girls were there, each one wearing a strip of lavender ribbon—that being the color adopted by their favorite club—and their families were all assembled to encourage the boys, while a large number of the friends of the Bloomington club swelled the crowd, so that the assembly numbered hundreds.

And soon a four-horse open wagon, driven by the man who had tried to save Gordon from the stream, and offered by him to the boys, drove up, containing the champions of the High School; and bright, athletic, manly fellows they looked in their neat uniforms.

Their costumes consisted of quiet gray shirts and knee-breeches, and lavender and gray stockings, while a shield was outlined on their shirt-fronts inclosing the monogram "H. S.", also in lavender, while their neat gray hats were trimmed with the same color as the letters.

A lavender-colored belt about the waist completed their dress, with the exception of gray shoes.

It was the first time their uniforms had been seen, and a hum of admiration went up from the spectators, who thus testified to their approval of Gordon's taste.

And he seemed to be the central figure, for his well-fitting uniform set off his slight but muscular figure to perfection, while his handsome face, glowing with health and excitement, caused more than one young feminine heart to flutter faster, while the story of his gallant rescue of Ben was repeated a hundred times over.

In a few moments the other club drove onto the grounds, and a feeling of dismay took possession of the partisans of the High School as they saw them descend—such big, brawny, bearded fellows were they.

In a short time the preliminaries were arranged, and Gordon and the other captain tossed for innings, the boy winning and choosing the "outs."

A gentleman who was thoroughly familiar with the game consented to act as umpire, and the field being cleared, the boys took their positions. In a moment more "play" was called, and the batsman calling for a "low ball," the sphere shot from Gordon's hand, and the game commenced.

The first batsman for the Bloomington nine was their captain and second-baseman, an old hand at the business, and thoroughly up in all the intricate points of the game.

Yet Gordon's puzzling delivery deceived him and he swept the air twice in vain efforts to "get onto" the ball; but at the third strike he hit fair, and amid a general cry of pleasure and disappointment the sphere sailed high into the air and far, far out toward left-field.

Here was stationed Jim Davis, and as he saw that the ball was going far over his head, he turned and ran as fast as he could, stopped, steadied himself and getting under the ball, caught it beautifully amid the cheers of his friends and a ringing cry of "well done, Jim!" from Gordon.

The next two batsmen went out easily; one on a foul tip which Ben gripped hard as it flew over his head leaping high in the air, and the other on a little "baby" fly which Gordon captured easily.

But when the boys went to the bat they found that they could do nothing against the terrific pitching of the opposing club; they had heard of swift delivery, but had never faced it, and often struck after the ball had settled in the catcher's hands amid many a howl of derision and cries from the small boys of:

"O, get a barn-door!"

"Toss him one!"

"What yer hittin' at?" and the like.

So the High School was retired in one, two, three order and took their positions in the field again with disconsolate faces, which were not brightened when the first batsman for the city hit for three bases far out to right-field and almost got home.

But the two succeeding men fell victims to Gordon's strategy and they commenced to feel more hopeful, when the third man drove the first ball pitched straight at Gordon, and so swiftly was it coming that the boy involuntarily stepped aside to avoid being hit but stuck out his left hand, and in some unaccountable manner the ball caught in his fingers and, although they were instantly numbed, he held on to it and the side was out without getting in the run they were so confident of.

And the cheers that went up caused the boy to grow red as fire and they did not cease until he had lifted his hat a dozen times.

And so the game went on amid marvelous exhibitions of skill, the boys gaining confidence as the afternoon wore away, for their

opponents had not yet brought a man home, while they themselves had not been able to score.

Nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen innings were played and still neither side had won and such excitement had never been seen in the city.

Nine mere lads to hold down these experts to nothing in thirteen innings? Why, it was incredible!

The driver of the four-horse team was in an ecstasy of delight, and even went so far as to offer to wager his team and wagon against an old horse-shoe that the boys would win; but no one would accept the outrageous odds.

"Beat Gord!" he cried, "the man don't live as can give that boy points."

"Just ain't he a daisy!"

But the sun was sinking low in the west, and all saw that another inning must terminate the game, and so it was agreed between the two captains, and a great hush fell on the immense audience as they took their positions for the final struggle.

And in a short time, by an unfortunate play by their short-stop, a grievous error by third-baseman, who had an excellent chance for a double play, and an outrageous muff by the first-baseman, the bases were all full, and not a man out on the Bloomington side, and the case certainly looked desperate for the boys.

And as if to add to their misfortunes a foul-tip, glancing off the bat, struck the mask worn by Ben, heavily, and, breaking it, cut his cheek just below his eye terribly, almost blinding him, when "time" was called, and ice-water applied to the wound.

Ben was the only catcher, unfortunately, that the High School boys had, and it seemed as if they would have to relinquish the game and give it to their opponents; but Wilson, who through constant association with Gordon, had absorbed some of the latter's pluck, leaped to his feet, and refusing the offer of the other mask, took up his position, bare-faced, under the bat and nodded to the umpire to call "play," while the applause sounded loud and fast.

And, wonderful to relate! so puzzling did Gordon send in his balls, that the next three men were put out by pitcher and catcher, and were whitewashed for the fourteenth consecutive time!

But the first two of the school-boys followed suit, and then Gordon came to the bat, called for a fair ball, banged away at the first that came, sent it sailing far over the fielder's heads, and before it could be returned had crossed the home-plate amid yells and cheers that fairly shook the earth.

The great match was won!

CHAPTER IV.

A NIGHT ADVENTURE.

In a short time after, Gordon graduated at the High School and, always having had a great desire to go West, he began to urge the project upon his parents; but they, considering him too young, opposed the idea.

But many of his friends pointed out how thoroughly capable of taking care of himself he was and how he had proven his courage and

self-reliance in the saving of Ben Wilson's life, so that, at length, their arguments prevailed and he left home in the spring of 1878, when seventeen years old, and landed in Wichita, Kansas, a short time afterward.

At that time the town was full of cowboys, cattle-men, gamblers and hard characters of every description, and midnight brawls and murders were of such common occurrence that scarcely any attention was paid to them.

One night, shortly after he had arrived, he found himself some distance from the town, having taken a long walk out over the prairie, and knowing of a hotel or lodging-house not far off, where he could procure a bed, he directed his way thither and, arriving at the door, knocked loudly, for there was no light visible and no evidence of life about the place.

And repeating his summons more vigorously he in vain endeavored to rouse some one within, but again without success.

"Hello, in there!" he cried, determined upon entering, for the night was getting dark and a few drops of rain began to fall, and he kicked vigorously on the door until it fairly creaked on its hinges.

"Who is there?" at this rude summons growled a voice inside.

"Open up!"

"Not to-night."

"Then I'll rap here until morning," and placing his back against the door he began to beat a tattoo on the wood with his heels.

"I am in bed," replied the voice.

"All the worse for you; get up!"

Whoever was inside thought better of his former answer, evidently, so cried out:

"Wait a moment!"

And in a few minutes the door was opened and Gordon stepped in out of the rain which began to fall heavily as he entered.

The door had been opened by a rough-looking customer, who was completely dressed and nothing about him indicated that he had just risen.

"Hello!" said Gordon, "I thought you were in bed."

"It is the boss who is lying down."

"Ah! then you are not the 'boss?'"

"No, I am," interrupted a voice which Gordon recognized as the one which he had heard while outside, and by the light of a lamp which the man held, the boy perceived in the corner of the room, where it was darkest, a bed and in it a man lying down, wrapped up to the chin in the cover.

"You are the proprietor, then?" asked Gordon.

"Yes, sir."

"And why didn't you open up?"

"Because I am in bed and sick."

"Oh, chills I suppose. But I want to remain here to-night; can you give me a room?"

"No!"

"But I cannot return to Wichita in this rain."

The man half-raised and then, recollecting, hurriedly covered himself, but not before Gordon had noticed that he was completely dressed and had a revolver buckled about his waist.

"Curious," thought the boy; "sick and in

bed, yet completely dressed and armed; I'll see this adventure through!"

"Well, if you must stay, I have a bed that I can give you; do you want to go to your room now?"

"Immediately."

"Well, then, Jim, show the lad to his bed."

And after whispering a few words to the "boss," as he called him, Jim, taking the lamp, motioned to Gordon to follow him and left the room, going up to the second story, which was nothing but the garret, and opening a door and pointing out a straw bed to the boy.

Then leaving the lamp on a chair—there was no table in the miserable apartment—with a gruff "good-night," he closed the door and withdrew.

And Gordon began to ponder:

"This man is in bed, completely dressed and is armed."

"Now these preparations cannot be for my benefit as I came here unexpectedly."

"I am naturally curious and I scent trouble for some person or persons unknown."

"I'll see it out."

And blowing out the light, he laid down on the bed, and lay there, waiting.

In a short half-hour he heard the stairs creak, as if some one were mounting them stealthily, and immediately began to snore gently, while the steps approached the door and then stopped, as if the person were listening.

Apparently satisfied that Gordon was asleep, the visitor descended the steps again and all became quiet.

A half-mile away stood a farm-house, surrounded by many acres of tilled land, while the numerous out-buildings scattered about, the general neatness of everything, gave proof that the owner was well-to-do and amply blessed with this world's goods.

The day before he had sold a number of fine cattle to a purchaser from Chicago and the money was still in the house, where his wife was alone, except a servant who slept in the upper story, for the farmer had been suddenly called to another farm he possessed some ten miles off, leaving his foreman Jim Reynolds, in charge until he should return.

But Reynolds had proven faithless and after sending the farm-hands off in various directions under different pretexts, had sought out the proprietor of the inn where Luke had stopped and proposed to him that they should rob the house, a proposition which was immediately agreed to.

The farmer's wife was seated in her room, reading, when suddenly the barking of a dog was heard outside, and she recognized in it Pluto, an enormous watch-dog which was loosened every night, and the young woman, startled, rose from her chair and listened, while the rain beat against the window-panes and the wind moaned down the chimney.

At the same moment she thought she heard voices in the garden, just below her window and she trembled with fear as she thought of the lawless population of Wichita and at the recollection of the sum of money her husband had left in her charge.

She went to the window, opened it and looked

out, but the darkness was intense and all was silent, the dog having ceased his growls.

"It is nothing," she thought and again seated herself.

But a half-dozen minutes had scarcely passed when again she rose and listened, for an unusual sound, one difficult to describe, a creaking and a crackling, struck her ear, as if some one were pressing hard against the front door.

Frightened, but determined to see what it meant, she took the lamp from the table and opening the door, stepped into the hall, but there she saw nothing, and then, going downstairs, stepped into the front hall, and there she stopped with a cry of alarm.

Two men, their faces daubed with soot so as to be entirely unrecognizable, had just entered the front door, one of them carrying a naked knife the other holding a short but massive iron bar in his hand.

These two men had just broken open the front door, and were about to go up-stairs when the young woman had appeared before them, lamp in hand, and they stood for a moment, hesitating.

Then one of them spoke:

"If you remain quiet we will not harm you; but if you call out or endeavor to escape, it might result in injury to you."

And as he spoke he turned the blade of his knife until it shone in the lamp-light.

"What—what do you want?" stammered the frightened woman.

"To say a word regarding your absent husband."

"He made a sale of some cattle yesterday and the money is now in the house."

"We do not wish to harm you—at least I do not."

"My friend here is a little impetuous, and if he was alone I do not think that he would have argued with you at all."

"He has a knack of cutting all disputes short with a blow of his crow-bar"—here the poor girl—for girl she was in years—shuddered, "which cuts all argument short."

"It is a short way of settling difficulties if it is a little brutal."

"But may be we can arrange matters amicably," continued the villain, who seemed to take pleasure in tormenting the trembling woman.

"But tell me what you want."

"Take everything, anything, but spare my life!"

And the young woman fell on her knees, setting the lamp on the stair beside her, and, clasping her hands, looked up entreatingly in the faces of the two robbers and assassins.

"If you care for life, you will show me where your husband's money is—all of it."

"We want—"

He never finished the sentence, for a flash sprung out of the darkness, proceeding from the half-opened door, a report was heard, a ball whistled and the innkeeper, struck full in the chest, uttered a horrible blasphemy, turned in his tracks for a full minute and then fell to the floor, stone dead.

At the same moment a slight figure sprung into the hall and, with leveled revolver, covered

the second robber, who, as cowardly as he was cruel, trembled with fear as he saw his companion fall, and tried to escape.

But a ringing voice cried:

"One step, and I fire!"

And he dared not move.

"Throw down that crowbar! or—"

And the iron clanged to the floor.

Then turning to the young woman, Gordon, for it was he, asked:

"Where can I confine this wretch?"

"The cellar has no window, and if he is tied—" stammered the girl, still half-stupefied, and scarcely comprehending this sudden change in affairs.

"Oh! I'll tie him fast enough. Come, you unhung scoundrel, get!"

And he marched him to the cellar at the point of his pistol, being lighted by the young woman, and, following him down the steps, bound him fast with a clothes-line brought to him.

And then going up-stairs, he was about to explain his sudden appearance, when the dog again barked, the sound of a horse's hoofs was heard, and in a moment more the farmer entered, having hurried home as he was uneasy about his wife.

And seated before a bountifully spread table, Gordon told how his suspicions had been aroused, and how, dropping from the window, he had followed the burglars, and arrived just in time.

And he was thanked again and again by both husband and wife, and at length retired in the best bedroom, the two vying with each other to see which could do the most for him.

And the dead body having been carried out into the wood-shed, and the door of the cellar securely fastened, the household sunk to slumber, and was disturbed no more that night.

CHAPTER V.

A FIGHT WITH A PANTHER.

IN the morning they were all astir bright and early, and the man who had been confined in the cellar all night was brought up-stairs, suffering intensely from the long vigil of the night, as he lay like a trussed fowl, unable to sleep, and a cup of coffee being given to him he was allowed to make a hearty meal, when, the farmer and Gordon having mounted, he was marched off to Wichita, there to be tried before Judge Lynch.

For, although the town was full of desperate characters, stealing was frowned upon, and any one caught in the act was more than once punished by the extreme penalty of the law.

When the news spread of the attempt of the night before, the better class of citizens immediately assembled to judge the man, while the rougher elements crowded to the spot from curiosity, and when Gordon had told his story, amid many expressions of praise and comments on his nerve and coolness, which were remarkable in one so young, sentence was passed; the accused man not offering a word in extenuation, and the wagon containing him was driven to the edge of the town, halted under the spreading branches of a large tree, and soon returned, empty, while a swinging body hanging to a limb, and with a placard on its breast, swayed to and fro as a warning to all evil-doers.

Soon tiring of the lawlessness of his associates, Gordon, in further pursuance of his first intention, started on foot for the Indian Territory, a distance of fifty miles, and passed some time in hunting and fishing, for the country was full of game.

He had not been long in the country when one day in the summer, while in search of game on the banks of Camp creek, where black bear and small panther abounded, he was wandering under the trees, when he suddenly caught sight of a dark object stealing through the undergrowth two or three hundred yards off to the left, and thinking that it must be a bear he cautiously hurried toward it, bringing his rifle to a ready, and loosening his knife in its sheath.

Owing to his being compelled to pay some attention to the path he was following, he lost sight of the game he was pursuing; but soon heard a crackling among the bushes not far ahead, which warned him that he was rapidly approaching his prey.

He doubled his caution, and soon caught sight of the animal, when raising his weapon, he took a snap-shot, and the bear rolled over on the ground, tearing up the turf in his dying agonies; while the boy, springing forward, drew his knife, and coming alongside his quarry, sunk the steel to the hilt in the wounded beast's side, the point of the keen blade reaching his heart.

And as the fatal stab was given the bear rolled over, gave one convulsive struggle, and instantly lay dead at his feet, when he, leaning his rifle against a tree near by, plucked out his knife and set about skinning the animal.

But as he leaned to his work, a scream rung through the woods that sounded almost like the death-cry of a human being, and Gordon received a shock on his shoulders that sent him rolling over and over on the grass, while his knife flew out of his hand and landed on the turf a dozen paces away, while the sudden blow dislodged his revolver from its resting-place on his hip, and it fell on the ground as he tumbled, just beyond his reach.

And as he lay face down upon the turf, he realized, from the low growls, the tearing claws, the gnashing teeth and the hot breath that scorched his face as the white foam dropped from the crunching jaws, that he was in the clutches of one of the panthers which roam about the banks of Camp creek, and which, crouched on the overhanging branch of some tree, had leaped upon him as he bent over the bear he had shot.

And then began a life and death struggle, for the lad was wholly unarmed, and for a few moments was unable to use his hands, being pinned to the earth; and all the time the curved claws were tearing at his back, so that his buckskin shirt soon hung in shreds about him, while the long white fangs were crunching at his shoulder, and the loss of blood, the hot, stifling breath of the beast, made him sick and faint.

But at last, by a mighty effort, he succeeded in rolling over on his back and grasping the panther by the throat, and he sunk his small but sinewy fingers deep into the velvet skin that lay in folds about the animal's neck, while he pressed one knee deep into his chest, and despite

his struggles, held the brute firmly on the ground; while all the time the rending claws were tearing his clothes into strips, and leaving long, deep, cruel gashes in the white skin and tender flesh.

And all the time the green eyes of the struggling panther flashed fire, and low growls issuing from his deep chest, the foam flew from his jaws in every direction, covering them both, while the green turf around was dyed crimson by the blood which flowed so freely from the boy's gaping wounds.

And Gordon, growing fainter and fainter, suddenly was thrown to one side, as the brute gave one convulsive struggle and a mighty bound, and his hold on the panther's throat was shaken loose by the muscular effort. In a moment more he was lying on the turf, with the grinding fangs of the animal ripping at his shoulder and neck, and he closed his eyes, utterly worn out, and gave himself up for lost.

But suddenly his outstretched hand encountered something cold lying on the grass, and catching it he, with one last effort, cocked his revolver, placed it close to the head of the ravening brute and pulled trigger, when the panther, with an unearthly screech, leaped high in the air and then fell with crashing weight full on the boy's body, crushing what remained of life out of him, and leaving him lying there insensible; while the tawny brute, stretching out his massive limbs, fell over to one side—dead.

And dyed as he was in the crimson fluid shed by both the panther and himself in this mortal struggle, the boy presented a ghastly sight, and seemed to have won the victory only at the price of his own life.

And the day waned, the sun set, the moon rose and still Gordon gave no sign of life, while the beasts of prey that roamed the forest, scenting the carnage from afar, began to gather from all directions, with numerous howls and screeches, and the nocturnal birds of prey, their shadowy forms flitting about the gloom cast by the trees, seemed like ghosts or uneasy spirits, hovering about the central figures in the moon-lit glade.

But as the night-winds arose and blew with increasing freshness over the stream and along its banks, a long-drawn sigh broke the momentary stillness, and Gordon, drawing his hands across his forehead, wet with the dews of life and of death, opened his eyes, and, looking about him, strove to recall his scattered senses.

For a moment all was vague and indistinct and dim to his mental vision and then as his hand, thrown listlessly out by his side, encountered the yet warm body of the panther, recollection flashed upon him, and he recalled in all its vividness, the terrible encounter in which he had shortly before taken so prominent a part.

And he, with an effort, suddenly sat up, while the beasts of prey, emboldened by the silence that encompassed him, which had drawn their circle of glistening fangs closely about him, startled by the movement, bounded back under cover and crouched, waiting until their victim should once more sink back, exhausted,

while their glaring eyeballs shone like blazing stars as they crouched in their coverts, licking their chops and uttering low growls of impatience at the delay which interrupted their expected feast.

In a short time Gordon sprang to his feet, feeling stiff and sore in every muscle and joint and raising his revolver, aimed at one of the balls of fire that glared at him and let a bullet fly in the direction of the greenish-hued target.

Instantly there was a yell of pain as the animal bounded into the air and then fell back crashing into the bushes which rustled and snapped as he rolled in his death agonies, while the rest of the horde fled in every direction, snapping and snarling, and the birds hooted a discordant accompaniment to the nocturnal chorus.

Feeling somewhat better from the fresh air, Gordon staggered to the river and there, removing his shreds of clothing, stepped into the water and washed and bathed his wounds thoroughly, although he was only able to use his right arm, his left hanging almost useless at his side from the severe wounds in his shoulder where the panther had gnawed and crunched it, and, feeling a hundred per cent. better after his bath, returned to the tree where his rifle was placed, after dressing himself, secured his knife and then, gathering a quantity of dry branches that strewed the ground in every direction, he built a rousing fire, and, cutting off a juicy bear-steak, toasted it over the embers on a forked stick and made a hearty meal, washing it down with long draughts of water from the creek.

And then he began his lonely vigil, keeping the fire burning brightly for the double purpose of driving away the wild beasts and protecting him from the chills of the night air, until finally the sun rose, when, cooking another steak, he made his breakfast and then, hanging the remainder of the meat in the branches, but with little expectation of finding it when he returned, he skinned the panther, when, throwing the hide over his shoulders he set off for the ranch where he was staying for a few days, reaching it after a long and fatiguing walk, often being compelled to stop and rest.

But at length he arrived and was warmly welcomed by such of the cowboys as were in camp, to whom he related his narrow escape, and receiving their congratulations and praises with becoming modesty.

One of the boys possessing some rude skill in surgery and medicine, dressed his numerous scratches with some healing ointment, and, after assuring himself that there were no bones broken, bound up the wounded shoulder with the assurance that in a few days there would be no further trouble and that the boy would be "all right" in less than a fortnight.

And so it turned out, for within the time specified, Gordon was completely restored, passing the interval about the camp and aiding the cowboys by attending to such light duties as he was able to perform.

Soon after this, by the advice of his father he applied for a position in the Government Indian Service, and through the influence of ex-Senator David Davis, of Illinois, he was ap-

pointed principal of the day-school at Pawnee Agency, Indian Territory.

Senator Davis was an intimate friend of Gordon's father and lost no opportunity of doing all in his power to aid the lad, and he soon became extremely popular among his associates and made friends with all the Indians with whom he came in contact, soon acquiring perfect command of their language, to which he took naturally, and in a short time being called "brother" by the young men and "son" by the more aged Indians—terms of friendship they only bestowed upon those whom they like and who have their entire confidence.

CHAPTER VI.

LOST IN A SNOW STORM.

THE time passed pleasantly enough at the Agency and Gordon, as the days wore on, became thoroughly familiar with the Indian manners and customs, and extremely intimate with the young men, hunting and fishing in their company and traveling all over the Territory with them.

He was soon initiated into all their secret rites and on more than one occasion assisted at their scalp dances, when he was the only outsider in the room, this being a secret dance and white persons not being admitted to witness it.

He also attended their Doctor, Medicine, Pony, Buffalo and Cow dances, after participating and dancing with the Indians as if he were one of them, besides joining them in playing Moccasin and other games of chance and skill.

He learned the sign language rapidly and thoroughly and soon found no trouble in conversing with the different tribes, the result being that he made many friends among them.

"Spotted Horse," who was shot and killed by a United States Marshal shortly after Gordon arrived in the Territory, or Nation, as it is sometimes called, was a warm friend of young Lillie, although their first meeting was a hostile one.

While camping on Bear creek, Gordon met him. Spotted Horse came up to the boy and gruffly accosting him said:

"I am poor: the white boy is rich.

"He must give that suit of clothes he wears to my son, who is with me."

Gordon naturally demurred, for he did not care to part with his outfit, and replied:

"No, I will not; for I need them myself."

"But my boy needs them more than you do.

"You have money and can buy others; but the Great Father, at Washington has given me no money for two years.

"Do you know who I am?"

"I do not.

"Who are you?"

"I am Spotted Horse, chief of the Kit-ka-hocks" (one band of the Pawnees).

"All white people know me and fear me.

"If you do not give me those clothes right away, I will kill you!"

"Spotted Horse," replied Gordon, "I have often heard the white people talk of you, and I know that many persons fear you.

"But I do not.

I will not give you these clothes, and I know that you will not kill me."

And turning on his heel the boy started to walk off, and leave the chief, with whom he did not wish to have any trouble or any further conversation.

But Spotted Horse called him back, and as the lad turned toward him the Indian spoke again:

"No, you are brave, like the Pawnees and I will not harm you, but will be your friend.

"I want you to be my brother.

"Will you?"

"Yes, I will always be your brother, and we will never have any more trouble."

And then, giving the chief a shirt and some stockings and one or two other articles of dress that he could dispense with, he added:

"These are pledges of friendship."

"Little Bear," replied the chief of the Kit-ka-hocks, "I will be glad to have you come to my lodge.

"It shall always be your home."

And the two cemented the friendship with a warm grasp of the hand, and from possible enemies became the closest intimates.

Gordon met him many times afterward and invariably found him pleased to see the boy, always calling him his brother and treating him as such.

Whenever Gordon visited his lodge, which was often, Spotted Horse never failed to give him his best buffalo robes to sit upon, while the squaws hastened to set before the boy the best they had in the way of provisions, which he could not refuse without offending the sensitive chief.

And although he was what is called a "bad Indian" and many persons, both white and Pawnee, as well as members of neighboring tribes rejoiced at his death, Gordon was very much grieved to learn of it, for the Indian had always been a true red brother to the lad, and, despite his faults, the boy loved him.

Through the influence of White Eagle, chief of the Skeedee band of Pawnees (upper class), and others of his Indian friends, Gordon was induced to allow his hair to grow long.

"Little Bear, my son," said White Eagle to him, one day while they were talking together, "you are very much like the Pawnees.

"You talk their language, wear moccasins and buckskin, and have many ways like theirs.

"Why is it you do not let your hair grow long as mine and that of your other brothers is?"

He replied that he would some time soon, and the conversation dropped.

But a day or two afterward Night Owl, another intimate friend of Gordon, broached the subject to him again.

"Why do you not let your hair grow like mine?"

His locks just swept his shoulders.

"Night Owl, I will not cut my hair for a year if you will agree to let yours grow for the same length of time."

"It is agreed," returned the Indian and they struck hands on the bargain, since which time Gordon's hair has been allowed to grow as it would, and now sweeps down over his shoulders in a golden flood which is the admiration and envy of all who see it, both youths and maidens.

And thus he became completely Indianized,

resembling the Pawnees in dress, in manner, in customs and in language and becoming thoroughly identified with them.

He remained in charge of the school for about two years and then resigned and went to the State line for a short time, but soon returned to the Agency and re-entered the Government service, this time as assistant or secretary to the agent and also acting as interpreter, a position he could fill thoroughly as he had acted as school interpreter during the last six months of his connection with it.

During the winter of 1880, Gordon, in company with a friend, started on a week's visit to his former home, and in the early morning set out from the Agency much against the advice of all, for it was bitter cold and the gray sky above gave evidence of a coming snow-storm should the weather moderate.

And so it proved, for as noon approached the white flakes began to drift down until finally they were completely shut in by the whirling mass as the wind rose and blew the fleecy particles before it.

And soon they lost their way, for the wind shifted a dozen times and they were at a loss to know in which direction their destination lay, but were compelled to keep moving for fear of succumbing to the intense drowsiness which weighted down their eyelids like lead so great was the cold.

And finally they became separated—how neither of them ever knew, and Gordon, leading his horse, for the poor brute was utterly exhausted, staggered on an on until the day faded out and darkness settled down over the white plain.

But presently he came to a little gully, the banks of which were high enough to shelter him and his horse from the piercing blast, and removing the saddle and bridle, he crouched low under the overhanging bank, wrapping himself closely in the saddle-blanket, while the horse stood with bowed head, shivering with cold as he too sought the shelter of the bluff.

And as the darkness came on the wolves, rendered furious by the long fast that they had undergone, gathered close and closer about him, snapping and snarling at each other, while the gaunt, gray forms stood out spectral against the wide background behind them made by the sheet of snow which enveloped and covered the whole face of nature.

But as they drew closer and closer, Gordon's revolver flashed its red flame out on the darkness of the night and, as one of the wolves fell, his companions leaped upon him, and before he was yet dead tore huge mouthfuls from the yet quivering flesh, as they growled and fought over the remains.

And all through the night Gordon fought against the slumber which overpowered him and against the pack of famished wolves, shooting again and again, with varying success, and whenever his aim was true, seeing the victim of his bullets torn into a thousand morsels and instantly devoured.

But at the first streak of dawn the gaunt creatures fled, and Gordon, catching the east by the faint light which stole over it, mounted his horse and rode in a southwesterly direction

through the piled up masses of fleecy whiteness, for the snow had ceased, the wind had lulled and his progress was easy compared to that of the preceding evening, while all around was as still as death, not a sound breaking the silence while the solitude was awful in its loneliness.

But soon his practiced eye caught sight of an object outlined against the snow-covered landscape, and as he drew near he recognized his companion's horse, while a little mound near by showed where he had fallen while the white shower had covered him as with a winding-sheet.

In a moment he was alongside and, brushing away the snow had lifted his friend's body from beneath it, and, placing the inanimate form across the other horse he remounted and set out again across the prairie, far over which he saw a thin, black streak arising, and knew it must be smoke from some camp fire or dwelling.

And in a half an hour or so he pulled up in front of a stage-ranch, and carrying his frozen burden inside, soon was applying restorations to him, which in due time had their effect, and the young fellow opened his eyes to consciousness and life.

And then Gordon, taking a hot cup of coffee which the man in charge of the ranch prepared for him, learned that they had strayed nearly twenty miles out of their way, and that, instead of being to the north and east of the Agency, they were to the south and east, so confused had they become and so aimlessly had they drifted about on the prairie.

Profiting by their experience the two friends remained at the station for several days, until the snow had disappeared and then thanking the man in charge, who refused all pay, they set out over the stage-road on their journey.

No further adventures befell them and in a day or two Gordon was once more at his former home, where he was made much of and warmly greeted and welcomed by all who knew him.

And he was met at the depot by his old friend the driver, who seemed never to tire of looking at him and asking him questions, while Ben Wilson, his former chum, now grown to be a perfect giant, nearly wrung his hand off, so glad was he to see him again.

CHAPTER VII.

STOPPING A RUNAWAY.

A PLEASANT visit was Gordon's at his old home and he was urged to remain longer than the week he had allotted for his absence; but his heart was in the Indian country and he would not prolong his stay.

On the day before he left Bloomington, he walked out with Ben Wilson into the country and soon came to "The Hole" where, a few years before they had both had such a narrow escape from drowning, and stood there looking at the frozen stream, and talking of the days gone by.

"If I had had this, Ben," said Gordon, swinging in his hand a long hair rope with which he had been lassoing various objects that morning to show the boys how it was used and which he

had not thought to leave at the house, "I would have yanked myself out in a hurry; that is if I had one end and some one on the bank the other."

"Why, Gord, I shouldn't think that was strong enough to bear any strain."

"Oh, you're 'way wrong," returned his friend. "I've roped many a steer with it, and, taking a turn around my saddle-horn, stopped him, too."

"I should think it would be awful hard."

"Much easier than to catch anything standing still, for you have only to throw the loop in front of the animal, and he generally runs into it, head first."

And as Gordon spoke he skillfully tossed the lasso over a stump standing in the field, thirty feet away from them, and jerking the rope, tightened the noose about the bark.

"Here, Ben, throw your weight against this," he said, handing the end he held to Wilson.

His companion took the rope as requested, and holding it firmly, leaned back with all his tremendous weight, but the horse hair lasso stood the test nobly and did not yield an inch.

"It's a beauty, Gord, and I believe it would be a good thing for policemen to have to stop runaway horses with."

"Yes, if they were in practice."

"Well, they could have a lasso drill every day, and all it needs is practice."

"Combined with a true eye and hand."

"Of course."

"Well, when you get to be mayor you can suggest it to the police commissioners."

"Hanged if I don't!" replied the young attorney so earnestly that Gordon burst out laughing.

"Well, stranger things have happened."

"Yes, and doubtless will."

"I wish your future honor all the good things that he can wish!"

"Thank you, my Pawnee friend; by the way, Gordon, I should think that you'd be tired of that life."

"Tired? Never!"

"Well, we'll see; but come on, we must get back to the city, and the first policeman I meet I'll ask him what he thinks of my lariat scheme."

"You must show him how simple it is to catch anything that you want to take in— But what is that?" he asked suddenly as a wild shriek came floating over the air.

"Let's hurry and see."

And the two boys, running as fast as they could, sprung into the road, just as a maddened horse, drawing a light cutter, dashed down the road toward them, while a lady, seated in the sleigh, and clasping a little child close in her arms, uttered scream after scream.

Just beyond where the boys were standing was the creek, with high banks, and it was more than probable that the horse would dash into it, if he did not smash the light sleigh to pieces against the sides of the bridge.

He was completely beyond control, for the head stall had given way and the bridle had slipped off of his head and hung only by the check.

As Ben saw the danger of the occupants of the sleigh, he sprung to the middle of the road and

braced himself for the shock, but sprung back as Gordon cried out:

"There's nothing to catch him by—stand away, I'll rope him!"

And leaping to the side of the road, the boy stood until the flying steed was almost opposite him, when he latched his lariat and the circling noose, whirling in the air, settled down over the horse's head onto his shoulders, and then, in obedience to a quick pull, tightened about his neck.

As he jerked the rope, Gordon passed the end he held twice around the trunk of a small tree just beside him, and held his end firmly, and as the rope tautened, the horse was jerked clean off his feet, and fell as if shot.

His neck had been broken by the sudden strain, and all danger to the occupants of the cutter was over, although they were thrown out, but fell unhurt on the yielding snow.

The lady and child were assisted to rise by the two young men, and found to be safe, with the exception of the shock and a minor bruise or two which were of small importance, while she, realizing how narrow had been her escape, as she shudderingly recalled the impetuous rush of the horse and saw the steep banks that were so short a distance away, burst into a thousand expressions of gratitude, thanking Gordon over and over again.

And he endeavored in vain to check the torrent of words and told her that what he had done was nothing, and only what any one else could have accomplished.

But she stopped.

"We owe it to your skill and courage, and coolness that we were not dashed to pieces."

"For as I saw that we were approaching the creek, I gave up and believed that only a miracle could save us."

"What wonderful nerve you exhibited, when you knew that two human lives probably depended on your catching my horse."

Gordon endeavored to laugh the matter away, but during the entire walk back to town, the lady continued to ring his praises in his ears and would only allow him to leave her when he had given his name and address that her husband might call and thank him.

"Tell you what it is, Gord," said Ben, as the two walked away together.

"I'm more than ever determined to push my project of equipping the police with lassoes." And meeting the local reporter of the *Evening Budget*, he stopped him and gave him a vivid and glowing account of the late adventure.

So, before long, the news was spread all over the city, and Gordon found himself once more the hero of the day; while many clothes-lines were surreptitiously removed by numerous small boys who spent the evening in practicing at all kinds of marks.

And many an unfortunate pig, accidentally lassoed, was yanked about by the hind-leg, squealing, by his triumphant captors.

And that evening the husband of the lady called to thank Gordon, and brought with him a magnificent gold watch and chain, which he forced the boy to accept, despite his urgent protests to the contrary, only begging in return the hair rope, which Gordon willingly gave

him, and which, to-day, forms one of the principal ornaments of his parlor and is one of his most cherished treasures.

But the next day, despite the earnest requests which he received from all sides, to remain for a short time longer, after shaking hands with his numerous friends, Gordon left Bloomington and set out on his way to the Indian Territory.

Reaching the Territorial line without further adventure, he engaged a freighter to take him the eighty miles which lay between him and the Agency, and started off.

They had gone but a short distance when the teamster, turning to Gordon, said:

"Suppose we cut across the country and strike the trail; it will save us five miles."

"If you think we can get through with the wagon, go ahead!"

"In course we kin git through."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure?"

"Yes."

"Well, I done it a couple o' weeks ago, an' reckon I kin do it ag'in."

"Crack your whip and drive on your wagon then; I'm game for anything."

"The creeks is froze, an' we kin go through all O. K., I'll bet a dollar."

"Shoot ahead!"

And they started over the prairie without further delay, it being then a little after seven o'clock in the morning, and, the sky being clouded, they had no sun to guide them.

Within a couple of hours it began to snow so hard that they could not see, and Gordon recalled, with dismay, his experience of a short time before, and wondered if it was to be repeated.

The snow came from the south, in which direction they were traveling, and they guided themselves by the wind; but it changed without their being aware of it, and veering around gradually, completely deceived them, so that soon they were entirely bewildered, and came to the conclusion that they were lost.

Yet they struggled on until about two hours after dark, when they reached the Salt Fork, tired and hungry, for they had been running and walking all day to keep from freezing.

They had no provisions, for they had expected to have been able to get their meals at the stage ranches, and had laid in no supply.

But they built a huge log fire, and camped for the night, neither of them sleeping much, and alternately watching the fire.

At length, however, the day broke, and trying the ice, they found that it was something over a foot thick, and through this they had to break, in order to allow their horses to drink, and then parching a little of the grain carried by the freighter for his team, they made a scanty meal, after which they hitched up and prepared to break camp.

But suddenly Gordon, who had been watching a dark spot on the plain, which gradually grew larger and larger, motioned to his companion to wait a moment.

"What's the matter?" growled the freighter, rendered ill-humored by the cold that pierced

him through and through, and the pangs of hunger which now gnawed at his vitals.

"Indians!" replied the lad.

"Well, what of it?"

"Ain't they all friendly?"

"Not always."

"When ain't they?"

"When they are Osages, and have just lost a chief."

"That is an Osage 'Hair Party'!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HAIR-HUNTERS.

WHEN a chief of the Osage Indians dies, they form bands of horsemen, who start out in different directions, scouring the country, north, east, west and south, which bands are known as "Hair Parties."

These "Hair Parties" ride about in search of any one they may encounter, and, capturing them, they cut their hair off with knives, not scalping them but merely severing their locks close to their heads.

All is fish that comes to their nets, and they treat every one, white or Indian, in the same manner, and this arbitrary proceeding often causes much trouble with the Pawnees, for they are only forty miles to the northeast of the Pawnee Agency.

By their dress Gordon could distinguish that the band which was now approaching belonged to the Osage tribe, while by various insignia and trappings they wore he was enabled to judge that they belonged to a "hair party," and realized that if they were not prevented both he and his companion would soon be shorn of their flowing tresses.

And although the boy had only worn his hair long for a little over two years, yet he felt as much pride in preserving it as if it had never felt the edge of the shears, and so determined to defend himself at all hazards from the attacks of the band.

The horses were hastily unharnessed again, and led back some distance into the wood, and then Gordon, taking his rifle, advanced to the edge of the stream, and as the band of warriors rode up on the opposite bank, he using the sign language, motioned to them to stop and asked what they wanted.

The conversation that ensued, although carried on entirely by signs, was easily understood by both parties and was translatable as follows.

"What do you want?" was the first question propounded by the boy.

"Leaping Panther, our great chief, has gone to the Happy Hunting Grounds, and we seek the flowing locks of the Pawnee."

"We have met none of that tribe and will not return empty-handed."

"The white boy and his friend must not resist, for it will be all the worse for them."

"You have no right to be off your reservation and will surely be punished."

"I will not, nor will my companion, submit to this outrage."

"I warn you to keep away, for we will defend ourselves."

"The white boy is foolish; we will come and take what we want."

"Then come on!"

The warrior who had been carrying on this interview with Gordon, then turned to his companions and said a few words to them, when suddenly, with a wild yell, the whole band applied their stinging quirts to their horses, and urging them forward, leaped down upon the snow and ice-covered surface of the frozen stream, and came galloping toward them at a furious pace.

"Aim only at their horses, Dick!" shouted the boy to the freighter, and at his words, the two rifles cracked in unison, and two of the mustangs rolled over on the snow, while the rest of the band kept riding on in their impetuous course.

Barricaded behind the wagon, Gordon and Dick repeated the fiery salutation and another horse fell, pinning his red rider to the ground beneath him, having fallen across the Indian's legs before the latter could throw himself to one side.

And in an instant more the savages were upon them, and they were in the midst of the howling mob, standing with clubbed rifles, and dealing blows right and left, and keeping the Indians at bay for some time.

The savages did not try to injure them, for their endeavor was to obtain the hair from their heads without otherwise harming them, while Gordon and Dick withheld their fire, not caring to shed any blood.

The boy had leaped into the wagon-bed, and from here hammered blows on all sides, and the butt of his rifle, encountering more than one skull, had brought several of the riders to the ground, where they lay half-stunned and completely out of the fight.

But just then a howl of rage uttered by Dick fell on his ears, and turning, he could not suppress his laughter as he saw the freighter dancing about like a madman, while the short bristles standing up over his head showed that his hair had been shorn close to his scalp.

One of the men whose horses had been shot at the first onslaught, had risen, and gliding between the struggling mustangs, had slipped up behind Dick, gathered his long hair deftly in his left hand, and then, with a circular sweep of his right, which held a knife, had cut the locks off as cleanly as if a first-class barber had done the job.

But the Indian's exultation was short-lived; for, while the rest of the band were gazing with stolid countenances and stoical satisfaction at the trophy which the red-man waved in the air, Gordon, who was far above the man on foot, leaned from his position in the wagon, and catching the ravisher of Dick's locks by the scalp lock, sent the razor-like blade of his own knife about the roots with a quick turn of the wrist, and in a moment more the long black braid, of a coarseness like a horse's mane, was lifted high in the air, while the discomfited savage roared with fury.

"Diamond cut diamond!" laughed the boy; and then, stuffing the hair into the bosom of his hunting-shirt, he dropped his rifle into the bottom of the wagon, and leaping astride of a mustang near by, he clung to the waist of the astonished rider; and then, gently touching the horse in the flanks with the point of his knife, sent the affrighted steed bounding through the woods,

while the rest of the band looked on in astonishment.

As the horse—a powerful animal, which seemed scarce to feel the weight of his double burden—sped off up the bank of the Salt Fork, Gordon kept kicking his heels into his flanks until the terrified steed fairly flew over the ground; and then, clinging by his legs, the lad grasped the top-knot of the chief, and before he could do anything to prevent, had added a second trophy to his other prize, when the horse, suddenly turning, threw the dismayed and demoralized Indian far out onto the ice—which just here was very thin—and he broke through without injuring himself, and escaped at the expense of a cold bath.

Gordon's escape from being swept off by the overhanging branches of the trees, as the horse dashed through them, was something wonderful; but he at length succeeded in checking the animal, and then turning his head, rode back to where Dick was still battling with the Indians, but now with only his clinched fists, for he had been disarmed and could have recourse to nothing but nature's weapons.

But as Gordon, again increasing the speed of his horse, rode down upon them, knocking them right and left, his long, golden hair streaming in the breeze, shaking aloft the black tresses of the chief and yelling like a demon, they scattered and fled, leaving the lad and his companion in possession of the field.

The Osages only stopped long enough to pick up their dismounted companions, and then sped away over the prairie completely discomfited, and soon disappeared.

And while Gordon sat at his ease on his captured steed, with one leg thrown carelessly over the withers of the panting animal, gazing at the woe-begone countenance of Dick, a whistle rung out on the still air, and the horse, in obedience to the well-known summons, flung his heels high, throwing Gordon headlong onto the snow, and then, galloping off, rejoined his master, who quickly mounted and sped away in the direction taken by his fleeing companions.

Picking himself up, Gordon submitted quietly to the sarcasms showered on him by the freighter, and acknowledged that it was only fair that he should, in turn, be laughed at; but told Dick that long before the latter's hair had grown he would have forgotten all about Gordon's mishap.

Then the team was once more harnessed up, and, crossing the frozen Salt Fork, stopping for a moment to secure the bridles from the dead mustangs, they being curiously plaited and interwoven with many odd devices, they proceeded on their journey, and, by ten o'clock, had found the trail from which the snow had been blown in places, leaving it bare and easily discernible.

About three o'clock that afternoon they hauled up at Walker's Ranch, on Big Greasy, and there got all the food he had prepared, and being decidedly sharp-set after their long fast, ate heartily and with the greatest relish.

After resting themselves and their horses for a short time, they again set out and traveled steadily until nine o'clock that night, when they reached the Pawnee agency, which was only

eighteen miles from Walker's, but so heavy was the hauling they had only been able to make the distance in that time.

Gordon was warmly welcomed by the agent, and, although he had only been gone a short time, was very glad to get back among the friends who loved him, and whom he liked so well, and to the life which suited him far better than any that he had ever experienced.

A good night's rest completely restored him, and the next day he felt entirely recovered, and to an admiring crowd he related his adventure in Bloomington, and his encounter with the Osages on the Salt Fork.

During the evening he called at the lodge of one of the old chiefs who gladly bade him enter and who placed at his disposal his finest robes and ordered the squaws to set before his son, Little Bear, the best that the larder afforded.

And then, after they had supped, they drew around the fire and story succeeded story, until far into the night, when, as Gordon was about to leave, the robe which hung before the entrance to the hut was dashed violently aside, and a young warrior leaped into the lodge, trembling like an aspen and his face of a ghastly hue which denoted the terror that held him in its thralls.

Speaking in Pawnee, without stopping to salute Gordon, and apparently without noticing him, the young man spoke, addressing his father:

"I have seen the Wild Hunter!"

"Impossible—he has not been heard of for many, many moons," returned the old chief, incredulously.

"But I met him to-night, on Black Bear" (the stream on which the Pawnee Agency is situated) "and was as close to him as you are to me."

"What happened?"

"I struck at him with my knife, but the blade turned aside, and with a hollow laugh, he disappeared in the trunk of a tree near by."

"My son, you have been dreaming. Go to sleep and try and dream better things."

"You come"—to Gordon—"to-morrow; for it is late now, and I will tell you the legend of the Wild Hunter. Good-night, my son."

And Gordon, leaving the lodge, returned to the Agency, his mind full of the legends he had heard, and almost expecting to meet some spectral apparition during his lonely walk.

But nothing appeared, and he was soon sleeping a sound and dreamless sleep, that lasted unbroken until daybreak.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LEGEND OF THE WILD HUNTER.

THE next evening Gordon was again seated in the lodge of White Eagle, where he found Night Owl, the young Indian who had said that he had seen the Wild Hunter the night before, and the old chief, slowly puffing his pipe, began to relate the legend he had promised, in his native tongue:

"Nearly a hundred snows ago, there roamed these forests an Indian, who, although he was not a chief, was acknowledged as a leader by all the members of the tribe to which he belonged.

"He excelled in all matters of woodcraft and was expert beyond all of his companions in the chase, in which he was always accompanied by two enormous gray wolves that he had trained, having captured them while they were yet very young.

"And he was in high favor with the head chief, who proclaimed his intention of adopting him and bequeathing to him the chieftainship of the tribe; but at this the young men naturally rebelled, and from admiring, they gradually became jealous of him, and plotted together to ruin the young favorite, but without avail, for all their efforts were useless and rather resulted in his advantage.

"But one day the chief, in company with White Wolf, as he was called, was hunting, when they came upon a huge stag with branching antlers, and to him they gave chase, and so fast and furious was their speed that they soon outstripped their companions and left them far behind, only the chief and White Wolf continuing the chase.

"At length the deer, driven to desperation, stood at bay, and, lowering his antlers, gored the chief's horse so severely that it reared and, falling back, threw its rider to the ground, and in another moment would have buried his horns in the body of the dismounted Indian, when White Wolf, flinging himself from his horse, received the stroke, and, although desperately wounded, raised himself slightly, and plunged his knife into the stag's heart.

"As he lay there, suffering, while the chief gazed upon him with the utmost concern, their companions rode up, and seeing in what sore stress the favorite was, could scarce contain their exultation, but they pretended the deepest sympathy, yet offered no consolation.

"The wound is mortal," said they, 'and naught can save him!'

"But at these words a tall, fantastically-dressed man, mounted on a powerful horse, rode into their midst, sprung to the turf, and advanced toward the wounded man.

"Who says naught can cure him?" he asked in a harsh, imperious voice.

"I can cure him and will, on one condition."

"Name it," returned the chief, eagerly, 'and though it took half my possessions it is yours!'

"I ask no gifts; my condition is that you ask no questions, nor seek to follow me when I depart."

"Granted; and now show your skill."

"Without a further word the unknown knelt by the quarry, and taking a huge, keen-edged hunting-knife from his belt, cut off the head of the stag just at the base of the skull and then cut a slit from lip to throat.

"And while the chief and the warriors looked on in astonishment, wondering what all this might mean, he turned to the wounded man and said:

"This must be bound on his head, and in a month's time he will be cured."

"Despite his incredulity the chief ordered that all should be done as the unknown wished, and the skull was firmly bound on White Wolf's head with buckskin thongs, when the unknown lifted him carefully in his arms, and bounding on his horse, cried to the Indians:

"In a month's time I will return with him, cured,' and before they could stop him, he was gone.

"But one of the young braves followed rapidly after him, while the chief cried:

"Trace him to his lair, Moose-Deer, and bring us word of his whereabouts."

"And turning away the chief rode off to his wigwam, followed by the others.

"Seeing that he was followed, the mysterious interloper checked his steed and allowed the other to approach, when Moose-Deer accosted him.

"What interest have you in this man?"

"None," replied the other.

"Then why do you take so much trouble?"

"For my own ends."

"And they are?"

"What will you give me to cause his downfall?"

"I have but little."

"Promise me to give me a sacrifice."

"Promise to kill the first living thing you meet, after leaving here, as a sacrifice, and I will so arrange matters that you shall take White Wolf's place."

"I promise."

"Enough. I will keep faith with the chief, and this man will recover; but he will lose all his craft and skill as a hunter. Begone!"

"And Moose-Deer, returned on his solitary way, and riding along, soon saw, coming toward him, a horse, walking slowly, but far over the plain, and he congratulated himself that here was the sacrifice that he was to offer; but at that moment the bushes alongside were suddenly parted and a young girl came bounding toward him—his well-beloved daughter.

"And, his heart full of jealousy of White Wolf, and full of fear of the mysterious stranger, he drew to the head the arrow he had already fitted to his bow, and the shaft, glancing like a ray of light, buried itself deep in the bosom of the fair child.

"And in a moment she fell dead, with a soft pathetic look in her eyes like a stricken fawn, while he, not turning back, hurried on to the village, where he reported that White Wolf was comfortably lodged and was well cared for.

"At the exact time promised White Wolf presented himself alone to the chief, looking thin and haggard, but entirely out of danger, and was welcomed more warmly than ever by the chief, who almost regarded him as one risen from the dead.

"But about a week after his return, White Wolf, having entirely recovered his strength, accompanied the chief on another hunting expedition, and they had hardly set out when his horse shied and threw him.

"Up to that time nothing of the sort had ever happened to him, for he was a perfect rider, and he got up much discomfited, while Moose-Deer looked at him maliciously, and when they started a deer, and at length succeeded in killing it, White Wolf was left far behind, although mounted better than even the chief himself.

"And shortly afterward, getting a fair shot at a buck scarce thirty yards off, he pulled his

bow and let the arrow fly; but it missed its mark, and the deer dashed off unharmed.

"You are out of practice, my son," said the chief; "but you shall have another trial."

"Bring me down yon eagle," pointing to a bird not far off.

"And as he spoke, the arrow sped, but it quivered in the trunk of the tree, some distance from the mark, and the unfortunate shooter looked distracted, while the brow of the chief clouded.

"You must regain your skill, White Wolf," said he, "or you never can hope to be chief of the Pawnees."

"Moose-Deer kept his own counsel and did not divulge his secret to any one, and having buried the body of his daughter, passed hours in a pretended search for her, while the village rung with his lamentations.

"The next day White Wolf went out alone; but, practice as he would, he found that he had lost his cunning with bow and arrow, while he had no control over either his horse or his trained wolves.

"And when he again hunted with the chief he became the laughing-stock of all.

"The chief at length dismissed him, saying:

"Take a week for practice and then we will see; but if you then do no better, some one else must succeed you as future chief."

"White Wolf answered not a word, but rode off wildly, but returned at evening with ghastly looks and strange appearance, for he bore, fixed like a cap on his head, the antlered skull of the stag he had killed, and which had formerly been bound about his head.

"His every action showed that he was crazy, and all but his jealous companions pitied him, yet they only jeered and scoffed, and, after committing the wildest extravagances, he burst from all restraint, and, plunging into the forest, he disappeared.

"And of all the young men who were installed in his place, not one of them retained their cunning—all their shafts went wide of the mark; all of their hounds lost their scent, all of their horses their speed.

"And the seasons came and went and the old chief died and none saw or heard of White Wolf, save now and then a belated wanderer in the woods, who claimed to have met a tall, weird-looking figure with antlered skull, who approached mysteriously and disappeared in the same way whenever any one drew near the spot where Moose-Deer had slain his daughter.

"For afflicted with remorse and a prey to a mysterious disease which tormented him, and baffled the skill of the medicine-man, he had confessed all, and said that at night he was forced to leave his couch and hunt in the forest with White Wolf.

"And whenever they had killed a deer, the Wild Hunter forced him to cut off its head and then look in its face, which invariably turned into the much-loved and bitterly mourned features of his murdered daughter.

"But no one had seen or heard anything of the Wild Hunter for years, until the evening before when Night Owl had burst upon them with the assertion that he had encountered him.

"And this is the legend of the 'Wild Hunter,'

my son, and may you never meet him, for the meeting always bodes ill."

And then silence fell upon the lodge, and Gordon sat there, in the dim light of the fire, scarce putting any faith in this tradition of the Pawnees, born of superstition, yet half-expecting to see the antlered helm peering through the crevices in front of him.

And he made up his mind that when the weather became settled he would investigate this matter and see if there were anything in the vision which Night Owl pretended to have witnessed.

So rising, he left the lodge, and proceeded leisurely along the banks of Black Bear, when suddenly without a sound, a dark form approached him from the wood, and as he drew nearer he could distinguish a huge black horse, bearing on its back a tall form.

And outlined against the sky he could distinguish the branching antlers it wore on its head, when drawing his revolver, he was about to challenge the intruder; but suddenly the horse gave a loud snort, the apparition was lit up by a brilliant flash of blue flame and as a sulphurous smoke filled his nostrils, the rider vanished, while two ghostly forms, looking like two gray wolves, dashed by Gordon's feet and followed the ghostly rider.

Then all was once more quiet, and the lad, half-terrified and wholly puzzled, hastened to the Agency and to bed, where he dreamed all sorts of wonderful things about blue fire, ghostly visitors, black horses and slaughtered maidens.

CHAPTER X.

THE CREEK OUTBREAK.

ON arising in the morning, Gordon related what he had seen to the agent; but the latter laughed at him, and persuaded him that he had been the victim of his overheated imagination, which had been wrought up to an intense pitch by listening to the stories of old White Eagle.

"He was probably testing your incredulity, Gordon, and seeing how far he could go and how much you would swallow."

"But I saw him," persisted Lillie, "and coughed for an hour from inhaling the sulphurous smoke."

"More likely your lungs were affected by the stifling atmosphere of the lodge, and when you came out the fresh air irritated the air passages."

"Well, you may talk as you please, but what I saw I saw, and that much I know."

But to make the thread of my story complete, I must ask my readers to go back with me to the summer of 1881, during the month of August, when the outbreak of the Creek Indians occurred, and during which time many whites were massacred.

Gordon was traveling in the Creek country, about the middle of the month mentioned, and with his companions had hauled camp on a small creek, seven miles northwest of Okmulga.

They were preparing their dinner, when they saw five Indians in full war-paint and costume coming down the trail at a lope.

As soon as the Creeks—for they belonged to that tribe—saw the party when they drew near the camp, they drew rein, and Gordon thought that they intended to stop; but instead, they kept riding on without saying a word, and observing the outfit of the party closely.

There were leaning against the wagon-wheel two Winchester rifles and a shot-gun, the latter having been brought along to kill small game with—the country being full of turkeys, coons, 'possums and other small game—while each man wore one or two six shooters.

There were eight in the party—seven horsemen and the man who drove the wagon containing the camp outfit, and cooked—they being on their way to Texas to drive up a herd of cattle.

The Indians rode on until they had gone a hundred or a hundred and fifty yards, and then stopped and began talking together.

One of them, a young buck, was riding a large, fine horse, and Gordon, being anxious to purchase a mount, told his companions that he would endeavor to buy this one.

So saying, he walked out on the prairie toward the Indians, and, using the sign language, addressed the young warrior, asking him how much he would take for his animal.

But the Indian made no reply, sitting stolidly on his horse, and staring at Gordon without expressing the least intelligence on his impassive countenance, and leading the boy to believe that he was not understood.

Lillie then addressed him in English, and afterward in Pawnee, but with no better result; and Gordon, decidedly impatient, addressed some strong remark to the band in general and to the young buck in particular, and turned to walk back to his friends, but had scarcely gotten twenty paces away when a wild whoop rung out on the air, followed instantly by the ringing crack of a rifle.

And as the bullet sped, Gordon fell prone on his face, while the Indians galloped off at a break-neck pace; and so sudden and unexpected had been the attack that his comrades had not reached their weapons when the Indians were out of range and disappearing over the prairie.

Gordon was soon picked up, and found to be only slightly stunned, as the bullet had just creased his scalp, hardly tearing the skin, but knocking him down with the shock.

It was a very close call, and the party vowed vengeance should they be able to overtake the Indians, and, leaving three of their comrades with the driver to protect the camp equipage and team, the others, numbering four and including Gordon, started off at a hard gallop down the trail in pursuit of the band of Creeks who had sought Gordon's life.

They rode hard, and when nearing Okmulga, met a large party of horsemen, well armed, who were about to start down the trail, and drawing rein, the leader of the strangers approached and, saluting them, inquired:

"Have you seen a small band of Indians?"

"Yes," replied Gordon.

"When and where?"

"About an hour ago—may be less—five miles northwest."

"How many were there in the party?"

"Five."

"Armed?"

"Armed and in full war-paint and dress."

"Boys," said the other turning to his men "they are the ones we're after!"

"These Indians," he continued, again addressing Gordon, "killed a Creek officer and wounded one or two others while resisting arrest, and we are trying to find them."

"Do you know which way they went?"

"They must have eluded us in the broken country, for we have seen nothing of them since they tried to shoot me."

Turning back with his companions, Gordon rode along with the new-comers, relating his late experience, and soon after, meeting the wagon which was slowly following, they separated and Gordon saw the posse no more.

He often tried to find out the fate of the band of Indians, but without success, and at length came to the conclusion that they had been exterminated and the matter kept quiet by the avengers of the officer and his aids.

One beautiful moonlight night, ten days afterward, Gordon and his friends were in camp, when the boy, who was on watch, saw sweeping over the plains, a large party of warriors, who seemed unaware of the presence of the whites in the vicinity, and Gordon, calling one of his companions to take his place on guard, and telling him that he was going to reconnoiter, quietly mounted his horse and rode away after the band without disturbing his other friends.

He knew that not far from where they camped, about four miles away, lived an old minister and his daughter, and fearing that it was the intention of the Creeks—for such he supposed the band of warriors to be—to massacre the old man and the young girl, spurred hurriedly forward in his endeavor to warn them.

But he was some fifteen minutes behind the warriors, and as he drew near the lonely cabin, he saw a bright light leap high in the air, and heard the wild yells of the savages as they exulted in the success of their deadly schemes.

Urging his horse forward, he soon swept from the gloom of the forest into the daylight brightness of the glade, in which was situated the home of the minister, and there burst upon him a scene of carnage and ruin such as he had never before witnessed in all of his varied experience.

The torch had been applied to the cabin, and the flames leaping high, infolded it in their tongues of fire, while at the doorway lay the dead body of the old preacher, his white locks dabbled with gore, while a small red spot on the crown of his head showed where the scalp-lock had been torn away.

And in the foreground, kneeling with uplifted hands as in prayer for mercy, was his young daughter, clad all in white, while behind her, grasping her long and flowing tresses in his left hand, stood a red demon with tomahawk uplifted, ready to sink the keen blade crashing into her brain.

But at that instant Gordon's revolver cracked and the Indian, shot through the head, reeled and spun around, and then, utterly dazed and

bewildered, turned and leaped headlong into the flames.

Gordon, sinking his spurs deep into the flanks of his horse, sent him bounding forward like the wind, and coming alongside the fainting girl, checked his steed with a pull that sent him on his haunches, leaped to the ground, lifted the girl in his arms, sprung into the saddle without using the stirrups, and disappeared in the forest, while a storm of arrows and of bullets whizzed harmlessly after him from the astonished savages.

Making a long detour he at length reached the camp, where he warned his companions of the proximity of the Indians, and advised them to watch until morning, which they did, without, however, being attacked.

The girl was tenderly cared for, and the next morning was placed in safety, begging Gordon to endeavor to get word to her brother of the fearful fate that had befallen her father, and of her whereabouts, that he might come to her.

And although the boy endeavored by every means in his power to find him, he could glean no trace of the missing man, and was forced to the conclusion that he must also have been murdered on the same fearful night.

For the girl told him that when attacked, she and her father were sitting up, awaiting his arrival, as he had promised to be with them that evening.

And the girl went East, and the recollection of the tragedy faded from the boy's mind as other and newer incidents attracted his attention.

But the Indians who had figured in it were punished severely and deservedly, for the old minister had lived in the country for years, and had always been a kind friend to the Indians.

Many and many a time he had clothed and fed the starving Indians, and none ever came to his door to ask, who was turned away empty-handed.

And not satisfied with killing and scalping him, the murderous Creeks so mutilated and disfigured his body after death that it could not have been recognized, had it not been known that he lived there, and had not a few white hairs been left clustering about his head to establish his identity beyond question.

And Gordon and his friends, proceeding on their journey, eventually reached Texas, and, taking charge of the herd, started to drive them up through the Indian Territory to the Agency.

CHAPTER XI.

A STAMPEDE.

TRAVELING slowly, the herders were well on their way toward their destination, when one day they stopped to allow the cattle to drink and graze, and to rest, for the day was intensely hot, and men and horses, as well as cattle, were tired out.

They were near the Pawnee reservation, being some ten miles to the north of it, and nearing the Oteos, who are located on a stream called Red Rock.

The air was intensely still, and there was a pervading feeling as if a thunder-storm were about to burst upon them, and soon the sky became overspread with black clouds, and the low

growling of heaven's artillery could be heard, approaching nearer and nearer to their camp.

The cattle moved about uneasily, and the men were kept busy, riding about and rounding them up, as they evinced a desire to stray, when Gordon, who was far out on the plain, turning back some stragglers, saw three persons running over the plain toward him at full speed.

He stopped his horse, and then, turning, rode toward the visitors, intending to stop them and prevent a stampede, for the Texas cattle are totally unaccustomed to the sight of a person on foot, and easily take fright when a pedestrian approaches them, if, indeed, they do not attack him.

Gordon soon drew rein alongside the newcomers, and saw that they were three Indian girls of varied types of savage beauty, and who, at the first word he spoke, stopped short as if for the first time realizing their imprudence.

They told him that they were Oteos and that their ponies had taken fright at something and galloped off in a bunch, leaving them ten or twelve miles from their village, and that seeing the camp, they had hurried toward it, fearing the approaching thunder-storm and seeking shelter.

And as they talked the curious cattle gradually drawing nearer and nearer, stood in a semi-circle in front of them, sniffing the air uneasily, pawing the ground and shaking their heads, while they occasionally uttered a low bellow as they looked and wondered at the to them curious objects before them.

And Gordon, realizing in what danger the girls' thoughtlessness had placed them, slipped to the ground as slowly and quietly as he could, and told one of the girls to mount, to take one of her companions behind her, while the third could grasp the horse's mane and run alongside, while he would endeavor to conceal himself behind the horse and circle around the ever slowly-advancing herd.

But before the girl could step forward to do as he suggested a bright flash of lightning sprung hissing through the air, the bolt tearing up the turf not a hundred yards away, while a terrific crash of thunder just overhead shook the earth and deafened the hearers, while at the same moment the flood-gates of heaven were opened and the rain came down in torrents.

And the frightened horse, suddenly wheeling, tore the bridle from Gordon's hand and bounded off over the prairie, while, as if the thunder-clap had been a signal, the whole herd of cattle stampeded and came sweeping down upon the quartette with a resistless force.

Wild with terror, the thunder of their hoofbeats on the quivering earth drowning the thunder that rolled and crashed above, their loud bellowings adding to the awful tumult, while with lowered heads they tore along, the fate of Gordon and of the three shrinking girls seemed sealed; for the impetuous course of a swollen river could more easily have been breasted than this awful tide stemmed and hurled back.

But the boy sprung forward and raised his revolver, and almost as he felt the hot breath of the leaders, scorching from their distended nos-

trils in his face he pulled the trigger, and the foremost of the herd crashed to the ground at his feet, while the mad animals, opening as a fan, divided and swept by this obstruction on either side, while Gordon and his frail companions crouched behind the shelter afforded by the body of the dead steer.

And in a few moments his companions came galloping up, and while two of them stopped to see if the boy was alive, the rest hurried on in pursuit of the stampeding herd, and soon overtaking them, they turned them to the left, and riding around kept driving them in a circle until they finally stopped, exhausted by their own fury.

Gordon was found to be unhurt, while the Indian girls were also safe, and they were soon in camp and sheltered from the rain, while the rest of the boys stood guard over the cattle to prevent their breaking away again.

And while the cook was an amused witness, the three girls made a perfect hero out of Gordon, using all of the extravagant and high-flown phrases with which their language abounds, until he blushed like a peony with confusion.

The storm ceased as suddenly as it had arisen, and Gordon furnishing the girls with horses, they set off for their village, promising to send the borrowed animals back in a short time, and as it was now growing late, the cowboys decided to remain where they were for the night, and accordingly camped.

Within the promised time the horses were returned, and with them came a delegation from the village, who invited Gordon and his friends to a grand feast to be held that night in honor of the three girls and their rescuer, for the rescued maidens were the daughters of three of the leading chiefs, and their fathers desired to do honor to their preserver.

After much coaxing the boy was persuaded to go, and with him went three of his companions, for the night promised to be clear, and no fears of another stampede disturbed them.

The dozen miles which intervened between their camp and the Oteo village were soon traversed, and Gordon rode up to the Medicine lodge among the yells of the warriors, the shrill screams of the squaws, the screeching of the children, and the yelling of dogs, and his ears were well-nigh ruptured with the infernal din.

The meal was set before them consisting principally of a dish that looked suspiciously like boiled, or rather stewed dog, but Gordon and his friends were not fastidious and ate heartily of the mysterious dish.

At length they had eaten sufficiently and the pipe being produced they smoked silently for some time until at length, the skin that closed the entrance of the lodge was raised and the three girls came in, each one bearing a gift for Gordon.

The first carried a beautifully embroidered belt, the work of her own dainty hands, and this she presented to him with a little speech, which embarrassed him more than it seemed to her.

The second gave him a pair of moccasins which she herself had worked, while the gift of the third was a hunting-cap of deerskin, soft as velvet, embroidered in many colors and ornaments.

with a magnificent plume plucked from the pinions of the war-eagle.

And then the girls stood back while the oldest and principal chief of the tribe arose and delivered a long harangue, in which he drew a flattering picture of Gordon's skill as a hunter, his bravery and his coolness in danger, concluding by asking him to come and live with, and be one of the tribe, and offering him as his wife, either of the confused girls who stood giggling and tittering in the darkest corner of the lodge.

But Gordon, in return thanked him for the proposed honor, which he assured him it was impossible to accept; and as for choosing a wife from the trio of Indian beauties:

"They are each and all so lovely and so lovable that I could not choose among them."

This conclusion had a double effect. On the one hand it flattered the trio as such; but on the other it rendered each of the dusky maidens jealous of the other two, and their friendship began to grow weaker until at length they became almost enemies.

But Gordon, escaping as quickly as he could from the close atmosphere of the lodge, followed by his companions, rode away under the bright starlight and was soon in camp, wondering that he had gotten off so easily.

But the hearts of the Indian girls were sore, for it was they who had suggested the proposition of Gordon's marrying one of them, each being confident of her own superior attractions, and when they found that they were all rejected, hate and the fact that they were scorned drew them into an alliance, offensive and defensive, when the bonds of friendship would not have induced either one to seek the aid of the others.

So they began to plot and soon formed a scheme whereby they hoped to win, or rather force, Gordon's consent to the proposed change in his life and habits.

But he, all unconscious of all of these machinations against his peace and happiness, rode away with the herd and was only occasionally reminded of the incident when his eye happened to encounter one of the gifts presented to him by the three girls.

They reached their journey's end when Gordon bade farewell to his comrades and returned to the Agency, reaching the Black Bear, as the stream is called, on which the Pawnee Agency is situated, late at night and riding slowly down the stream, after crossing it.

But suddenly his horse stopped with a shiver and neighed loudly, while an answering whinny came from the woods near by, and turning his head Gordon, thought he could see a coal-black steed standing under a spreading tree near by, and pressed his unwilling horse a little nearer in order to investigate.

And he found he was not mistaken, for he beheld a wild-looking horse attached by the rein to one of the lower branches of the tree, and the eyes of the steed flamed like carbuncles as he glared at Gordon.

And Gordon, urging his horse forward by the free use of the spur, drew near, when alarmed by his approach the black steed neighed loudly, and a dark figure, with branching antlers on

its head, dropped from the tree into the saddle and loosening the fastenings darted among the trees with incredible swiftness.

And Gordon gave chase, but although well mounted, was soon left far behind, and abandoned the pursuit, returning along the road he had been following and, recognizing the tree where the horse had been tied cut a deep cross in the bark that he might be able to distinguish it when he next came that way, for he was determined to solve this mystery, which, at the present time, seemed wholly inexplicable.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WILD HUNTER TO THE RESCUE.

WHEN Gordon arose the next day he went to the Agency and there met several of the Pawnees, who seemed to be very much excited, and were talking and gesticulating rapidly, and, mingling with them, he soon learned the cause of their conversation.

Some of the young men, who had gone out very early that morning, had ridden along Black Bear, when they came to the spot where the tradition that Gordon had heard placed the abode of the Wild Hunter; but, as daylight had banished their fears, they were talking and laughing, when suddenly a sight met their eyes which filled them with terror, awe and superstitious fancies.

For laid out, side by side on the ground, were the bodies of seven Creek warriors, each one stone dead, and bearing in the center of his forehead a brand, burnt deeply into the flesh, and the mark was a pair of antlers!

They had not stopped to investigate, but had turned and fled from the haunted spot as if they feared that the same fate might overtake them, and had not ceased their headlong flight until they had reached the Agency.

There they acquainted their companions with what they had seen, while the legend of the Wild Hunter flew from lip to lip with many and varied embellishments.

Gordon, recalling the vision that had confronted him the night before, was much impressed by this new incident, but could not believe that there was anything supernatural connected with it; but he went to the agent and told him what he had seen and of this last development.

"Well, Gordon, we'll settle it now."

"Go and saddle two horses and we will ride out and see if the Indians are mistaken or not."

"I have known them to mistake a swan for a ghost and a limb of a tree for a corpse."

"All right," replied Gordon.

"I'm going to see this thing through if I have to go to the place at midnight."

They were soon mounted and riding along the banks of Black Bear, but alone, for not one of the superstitious savages would venture out of the village.

"Will you know the tree again?" asked the agent, as they trotted along.

"Certainly."

"And how?"

"Oh! didn't I tell you? I blazed it or rather cut a cross in the bark, last night,"

"A cross?"

"Yes."

"Well, if it is a demon who is working all of these mysteries, he'll shun that spot."

"Why?"

"Because no first-class evil spirit will ever venture near that holy symbol."

"Well, demon or mortal, I'm going to track him to his den!"

"I hope you may; for if the mystery is not soon solved the Indians will all go crazy with fear, and then we *would* have a lively time."

"Here is the tree," suddenly interrupted Gordon, as he pointed to a huge monarch of the forest a few rods away, in the trunk of which could be seen the white cross cut deep in the bark.

"And there are the bodies!"

"The Pawnees were right, then."

"Yes, for once."

"Well, let us investigate."

But search as they would they could find no trace of the presence of a human being save the presence of the seven stark bodies.

Each man had been killed by a deep cut in the back of the head, evidently inflicted by a tomahawk or hatchet and burnt deep into the forehead of each was the brand the Indians had spoken of—a pair of branching antlers.

"This tallies well with what their legend teaches them, and is certainly most curious."

"But we can do nothing now."

"Come, Gordon, we will go back to the Agency and send a wagon for the bodies which we will care for until we can communicate with the Creeks."

"I will stay here," replied Gordon.

"If the antlered hunter returns I will give him a warm welcome; send me out some lunch and I will remain until morning."

"Very well; you are not afraid?"

"Of what?"

"Of the Wild Hunter," laughed the agent.

"Not a bit, no more than of a tame one."

"Well, good-by!"

"Good-by!" returned the lad cheerily and then, leading his horse some distance off, he hopped him and returned to the tree, leaning his rifle against it and seeing that his revolvers were easy in their places, and then seated himself on the turf and leaned back against the huge trunk.

Not a sound disturbed the silence of the forest except the occasional snorting of his horse as he grazed, until the wagon sent by the agent arrived and the bodies were placed in it.

The men in charge then departed, leaving Gordon's lunch with him, and he, after eating it, and taking a drink from the stream near by, seated himself in his former place and began to think of a hundred different things.

But from thoughts he gradually drifted off into dreams, and, leaning back against the gnarled trunk of the tree, slept long and profoundly, for he had been up late the night before and was fatigued from his long ride.

And so he slept on, unheeding the light footsteps which barely stirred the grass over which they swept; unaware of the slight figures that cautiously approached him; unconscious of the plot that was being unfolded to win, or lose, him forever.

But suddenly he started!

A light hand had been laid upon his shoulder, a soft voice had whispered in his ear:

"The maidens of the Oteos woo thee from thy slumber!"

"Awake!"

At first he could scarcely distinguish anything about him, for it was growing dark and the long shadows cast by the trees heightened the gloom that surrounded him.

But soon he saw standing in front of him three indistinct figures, whom he recognized as the three girls he had saved from the mad cattle a short time before, and would have stepped toward them to obtain an explanation of this mystery, when he suddenly realized that he was bound fast to the trunk of the tree behind him.

And he also saw that his arms had been deftly taken from his belt and that he was without a weapon.

Approaching him as he sat there, the three girls lifted him to his feet, after loosening the thongs which held him close to the tree, and then, with many an encircling fold, bound him upright to the trunk, wrapping the lariats they carried around and about him in a hundred coils, until he could not move a single muscle.

And then one of the girls spoke:

"Little Bear, you see before you three maidens who are rivals in love, but sisters in hate."

"You saved our lives not many days ago, and won our gratitude; and this gratitude has changed to love."

"We have vowed that you should wed one of us, and now we await your choice."

"Two of us will abide by your choice of the third, and, although sorrowing, will wish you much happiness."

"Refuse to take one of us, and you perish by fire where you stand."

"Choose!"

And the three took up their stations before him and stood, with folded arms, awaiting his answer.

"But at least give me a little time to reflect!" cried Gordon, whose situation seemed desperate and who wished to plan some mode of escape.

"You shall have until the rising moon can be seen over the topmost branch of yonder tree."

"If you have then decided we will ride away to our village and bring our friends and relatives here to celebrate the nuptials."

"If you have not chosen, then you perish by fire."

"Think well before you speak; for we are determined and merciless when our love is scorned!"

Not for a moment did Gordon think of accepting their proposition and he well knew that they would not parley with him.

He understood the Indian nature thoroughly and realized that when scorned the love of a red maiden turns to the most deadly hate, and that the caressing hands of one moment often wield the keen blade on their lover the next.

His position was a precarious one, for no one was near to aid him and he was powerless to help himself, and at length he became reckless and desperate, and after tugging vainly at the

bonds which held him, he called to the girls who sat a little distance off, like statues of fate, and they eagerly approached.

The moon had not yet reached the point set by the girls and they doubtless supposed that he was tired of his constrained position and had determined to accept their proposition.

But if they believed this his first words quickly undeceived them:

"Bring on your fagots, demons, rather than women!" he cried. "Better to perish in the slow-burning flames than to purchase freedom at such a price!"

"This is your determination?" fairly shrieked the three, mad with rage and disappointment; for each had thought she would win him.

"My final determination—I shall speak no word more!"

Then the Indian blood boiled at what they considered a deadly insult, and they began to pile leaves, twigs, branches, and dead boughs in a half-circle in front of him and some distance away, that his torture might be greater from the slowly increasing heat.

And then as the rays of the moon shot over the top of the tree pointed out by the girl, the trio stepped forward and ignited the pile of brushwood in three different places, and the flames began to creep, with snap and sparkle, in different directions, until the whole mass was ablaze.

And soon the heat became unbearable, his clothes began to smoke and scorch, while the flames kept growing hotter and hotter, and gradually crawling nearer, darted their red tongues toward his face.

But suddenly a loud neigh was heard, and an immense black horse leaped into the circle of light, a tall figure sprung from his back, wearing an enormous pair of antlers on his head, released Gordon with one sweep of his knife, and, lifting the boy, with one bound was again in the saddle, and with a wild laugh disappeared, while the terrified girls, for one moment stupefied by fright, the next fled from the place, overcome by their superstitious terror of the Wild Hunter.

CHAPTER XIII.

A WILD RIDE.

THE intense pain he had suffered from the scorching flames and the suffocating smoke that he had inhaled from the green boughs that had been scattered in the fire, had reduced Gordon to a state of insensibility, so that as he was cut loose from his bonds he was unconscious of what had happened, and lay like a log across his rescuer's knees during the ride through the forest.

When he recovered consciousness he found himself lying on the turf near the Agency, while all around him was still, not a living thing being in sight, while far above him the moon sailed on placidly.

He recalled with an effort the narrow escape that he had made, but could not understand how it had been effected, but came to the conclusion that the three maidens had relented and released him, after trying his courage to the utmost.

He determined, therefore, to keep his own counsel, and not to say anything to any one regarding his late adventure; so crawling to bed, he remained there, suffering, but enabled to reduce the pain of his burns by some simple ointment that he had, and, evading all questions, pleaded sickness and kept his room for several days.

When he reappeared he was completely recovered, and in answer to the agent's questions, assured him that he had seen nothing of the Wild Hunter, and that he had fallen asleep at the foot of the tree.

The matter was finally dropped, and Gordon, going to the place where he had so narrowly escaped a terrible death, found his weapons hanging to a branch of the tree to which he had been tied; they not having been disturbed, as no Indian, since the late discovery of the bodies beneath it, could be induced to venture anywhere in its vicinity.

The charred branches scattered about and the scorched bark on the tree, however, gave witness of the recent attempt on his life, and Gordon determined that he would not again be caught napping beneath the shadow of that tree, at least.

But on reaching the Agency again, other thoughts took the place of those which had puzzled him; for he found that it was necessary that he should be the bearer of certain dispatches that it was extremely important should be delivered without delay at another Agency.

And to carry them Gordon was requested and readily consented, wishing for a change of scene and a more active life than he had been leading for the past few days.

When the news spread that Gordon was to make the attempt, his brother—who was known as "Bare-back Al, on account of his once having ridden ninety miles in a day, bare-back—and his uncle, known as Pawnee John, decided to accompany him.

The dispatches were most important, and Gordon was cautioned, time and time again, to be careful with, and to deliver them at all hazards.

The road they were to take lay through a wild country, swarming with Indians, horse-thieves and desperadoes of every description, and it was well known that the enterprise was one of difficulty and danger; but the boy did not hesitate for an instant, but prepared for his wild ride as gayly as if dressing for a ball.

And as the sun reached noon-mark they set forth, spurring through the streets of the village amid the well-wishes of all, and the shouting and yelling of the Indians, who had assembled in full force to see their young friend off.

Their objective point lay three hundred miles away, and this distance was to be traversed, according to Gordon's calculations, in four days—a task that required iron endurance and much good fortune in the way of procuring fresh horses on the road.

They rode on and on through the heat of the afternoon, pushing their horses at a steady gallop, and crossing stream after stream until the sun was getting low in the west, when, reaching the banks of the Simeroon river, thirty-five

miles from the agency, they stopped to let their horses rest and to eat a mouthful of lunch.

But as they sat around the camp-fire which they had kindled to make a cup of coffee, Gordon suddenly rose to his feet as a horseman rode over the brow of a rise on the prairie, and, seizing his rifle called out to know what the stranger wanted, for in every approaching object an enemy was to be feared.

"I hev lost my way, pardner," replied the unknown, "an' seein' the smoke of yer fire, came up to ask ef you could d'rekt me."

"Where are you going?"

"To ther Agency."

"The Pawnee Agency?"

"K'rect."

"Straight north, about thirty-five miles."

"Whew!" whistled the other, "too fur ter go to-night."

"Say, young teller, kin a lonely wand'rer camp with yer to night?"

"We are going to break camp in about an hour."

"Goin' ter take a moonlight ride, be yer?" sneered the stranger.

"Well, don't let me detain yer!" and wheeling his horse the stranger galloped off south, instead of taking the direction pointed out to him by Gordon.

"Some fellow sizing us up," quietly remarked Bareback Al, who sat quietly and unconcernedly munching his supper.

"If his pals are in the neighborhood, we'll have to look out, that's all."

But nothing happened to interrupt their repast, and they chatted on a thousand different subjects until Gordon suddenly said:

"My instructions are to acquaint you with the contents of my dispatches, so that in case anything happens to me and either of you gets through he can deliver the message."

"Word has been received—how I do not know—that a large band of horse-thieves is being organized, to make a raid down through the territory and into Texas, and these dispatches are sent to warn the commander of Fort Blank to be on the lookout."

"That is all there is in them."

"But I have noticed, hanging around the Agency for several days, a tough-looking customer, whom I suspect of being connected with this same band; and if I am not mistaken he is the identical gentleman who accosted us a while ago."

"They evidently suspect something and want to get hold of the papers to obtain proof."

"If we are attacked, you, uncle John, act as if the documents were in your possession to draw attention from me, and I'll try and get through with them."

"All right, Gordon, we'll fool 'em!"

And the horses being by this time somewhat rested, the three arose and, saddling their steeds, mounted and again rode south.

As they drew out on the prairie, a little clump of trees loomed up on the plain not far ahead and in the shadow cast by the branches, the three riders could distinguish several horsemen; but Gordon whispered:

"Ride straight on, and don't spur until they give chase."

"All right," was the quiet answer and the three galloped steadily on without increasing their speed until nearly opposite the grove, when a dozen mounted men burst from their hiding-place and swept out over the plain toward them.

Then the trio put spurs to their horses and the noble animals, much rested by their late halt, leaped out in a stretching run and fairly flew over the prairie.

On, on, they sped until the pursuers, whose horses were of blooded stock and much fresher than the others, began to gain on them, inch by inch, and the boy, looking over his shoulder, saw that the chase could only last a short time longer, when they would be overtaken.

Not a shot was fired, for the pursuers evidently were certain of their victims and did not wish to shed blood, knowing that the killing of a Government messenger would entail serious consequences.

But at length Gordon whispered to Pawnee John:

"Make a break for the bluffs at the left, and answer me when I call to you!"

The other nodded understandingly and, bearing on the reins, suddenly swerved and bent off toward the broken country on his left, while Gordon cried out:

"Take care of the dispatches!"

"I'll not lose them!" came back the answer, while the band of pursuers, thinking Pawnee John had the important documents, swept off after him, all but one man, who, fearing a ruse, galloped on after Gordon, and, coming alongside, grasped his horse by the bridle.

But the boy, drawing and clubbing his revolver, dealt him a fair blow with the butt, between the eyes, and the man, loosening his grasp on the rein, fell heavily to the ground, while Gordon, the horses running alongside each other at full speed, leaped from his saddle onto the other steed and swept away at redoubled gallop.

And he and Bareback Al, rode along together, and were soon lost sight of the horse-thieves, who, overtaking Pawnee John, quickly stripped him, and finding nothing, were mad on discovering how they had been tricked, and kicking and cuffing their victim, left him for dead on the plain.

And Gordon and his brother pursued their way, stopping now and then to rest, until Al's horse succumbed to the terrible strain and fell dead, while Gordon pressed on alone, riding but slowly until at length his horse also gave out, and he was compelled to traverse the remaining ten miles on foot.

And as he drew near his destination, he was again attacked and ran a race for life and death, through the thick chaparral, taking to the broken ground where the horsemen could not follow, cutting his feet on the sharp rocks, tearing his clothes and his flesh in a thousand places on the sharp thorns, until, at length he staggered up to the fort, asked for the officer in command and was admitted.

And stumbling into the room, bleeding, dirty, haggard, he saluted the colonel, and gasping:

"Dispatches from Pawnee Agency, sir," he fell heavily to the floor, completely exhausted.

CHAPTER XIV.

WARNING.

THE return to the Agency was unmarked by any interruption, as most of the distance was traveled in company with the United States troops, who were sent out in search of the threatening band of horse-thieves; but with no success.

Knowing of Gordon's mission and that he had carried it through, despite the efforts made by them to prevent, they had taken fright and left the country: while the young fellow was warmly praised for his daring and strategy.

At the Agency he found both Pawnee John and Bareback Al; who had succeeded in reaching it without any further encounters, although Pawnee John still bore the traces of his encounter with the band which had pursued him.

Gordon determined that he would unearth the mystery that hedged the Wild Hunter about, and determined, also, that he would solve the enigma, alone and unaided. So, soon after arriving at the Agency, he set out, one dark night, well-mounted and prepared to give a pressing chase to the weird stranger.

He was well armed: but as he had an indistinct idea that he had been saved from the flames by the Wild Hunter, he determined not to use his weapons against him, but only to resort to them in case of his encountering some unexpected danger.

Arriving at the mysterious tree which seemed to be the haunt of the apparition, he withdrew into the deeper shadows of the wood and there sat motionless, his well-trained horse betraying by neither sound nor movement that he was there.

And after a somewhat prolonged vigil, his patience was rewarded by hearing a noise, as if some one were crashing through the undergrowth, and soon a tall figure came toward him through the darkness, barely discernible through the shades of the night, and rapidly approached, while his horse broke the stillness for the first time by a whinny of fear, and trembled in every limb.

At the sound the unknown stopped and peered in the direction where Gordon was and at the same moment the lad urged his frightened horse forward and neared the weird-looking stranger, who stood, drawn up to his full height, which looked gigantic to Gordon, with folded arms, awaiting the approach of the intruder.

But as Gordon approached, the figure circled the huge tree near which he was standing, and disappeared as completely as if the earth had yawned wide and swallowed him in the opening, and nearing the monarch of the forest, he sprung from his panting steed and, taking the bridle-rein in his hand, walked in the direction where he had last seen the apparition standing.

Ever and anon a rustling in the grass warned him that the spot abounded in snakes, and he stepped carefully, to avoid treading on one of the reptiles and, possibly receiving a fatal wound from the poisoned fangs of the serpents.

His horse, which, until a short time before, had been all fire and impetuosity now exhibited the greatest alarm, trembled and quivered, snorted and drew back and had to be dragged along by main strength.

When he approached close to the tree its gnarled and twisted trunk rose before him like some huge tower and as he passed around it, he perceived in its side a huge rift, which appeared as if caused by the lightning's stroke; but no one was in sight, and, stopping, Gordon called out:

"Man or Spirit, whichever you are—appear!"

And at the summons a loud, maniacal laugh was heard; a dim sulphurous flame burst from the opening in the tree and while the same suffocating smoke that he had experienced before assailed his nostrils, a tall, gaunt figure burst into view, wearing an enormous pair of antlers on its head and grinned and mouthed at the boy whose courage held firm during the fearful ordeal.

But his horse, rearing and plunging, broke away and galloping off through the forest, was in a short time lost to view while the sound of his hoof-beats gradually died away in the distance.

"You have called me, Gordon Lillie," then spoke the apparition in deep tones.

"I am here. What do you desire?"

"Knowing my name, you should also know my errand," curtly responded the boy.

"Your errand is doubtless to solve the mystery of the Wild Hunter—if you can; is it not so?"

"Your judgment is correct.

"I do not partake of the superstition of the Indians, and, whatever mystery may be connected with you, I do not believe that it is supernatural."

"An idle curiosity influences you, then?"

"No; a wish to aid the unfortunate creature who is thus compelled to play upon the fears of the credulous savages for some purpose of his own.

"Is it for vengeance that you thus masquerade?"

"I am the spirit of the Wild Hunter, and my vengeance is directed against the whole of the human race!"

"And why?"

"Give me your hand that you will not unfold my history until I give you permission, and I will tell you all."

Gordon stretched out his hand and placed it in the palm of the stranger, and instantly his fingers were squeezed as if in a vise, and he was drawn toward the tree by a strength that seemed almost superhuman, while he was blinded and suffocated by a thick sulphurous vapor that arose about his head.

At the same moment a blanket was thrown over his head, and before he could extricate himself from its folds, his arms were pinned to his body by an encircling cord, and he was dragged into the hollow tree, and then, before he was fully able to realize what had happened, he became unconscious, and knew nothing of what followed.

When his senses returned to him Gordon found himself lying on the turf, near the edge of the forest, a most intolerable headache racking his temples and the recollection of past events vague and indistinct; but with an effort he recalled the adventures of the preceding night—for it was now broad daylight—and his interview with the Wild Hunter.

Despite his doubts he could scarcely refrain from attributing something supernatural to the strange being, and this was heightened by his weak and exhausted condition, for the overpowering smoke he had inhaled, and which had caused his insensibility, still left its effects lingering in his heated imagination.

The champing of a bit and the stamping of a horse aroused him somewhat, and looking off a little distance, he saw his horse fastened by the reins to a low-hanging branch near by, and rising, he approached him, and was about to mount when a small piece of white paper, scorched around the edges as if it had been near the fire, pinned to the trunk of the tree attracted his attention, and taking it down he saw that it bore a brand and some written characters, which were flame-hued in color. On the document thus stamped, was written:

"Seek not to solve the mystery which environs the Wild Hunter; or do so at your peril.

"Twice you have escaped; but the third adventure may be fatal to you!

"BEWARE!

"His vengeance demands sacrifice; and he will immolate all on the altar of his wrath.

"Be warned and venture no more near this fatal spot.

"Respect his secret and you are safe; endeavor to penetrate it and the consequences will surely be fearful!

"Again, BEWARE!

THE WILD HUNTER."

Carefully reading the missive, Gordon then mounted and rode back to the Agency, wondering whether or no he should tell this last adventure to

the agent; but at length decided to keep his own counsel and to pursue the adventure alone; for he was determined not to abandon it, despite the warning he had received.

Arriving, he was accosted by the agent:

"Well, Gordon, been out on another hunt after the mysterious demon of the woods?"

"Yes."

"Did you find him?"

"Yes; or rather, he found me."

"And what was the result?"

"Oh, my horse got frightened and broke away from me, the 'demon,' as you call him, disappeared and I did not see him again; and when I recovered my horse it was daylight."

"So you have no clue as to who he is?"

"None at all."

"Well, I don't believe in the existence of any ghosts, and don't think any person ever saw one."

"Capture the Wild Hunter and bring him in, and perhaps you'll convert me."

"Oh, I'm making no converts."

"I thought you were."

"The next time, though, you want to go on a midnight chase, let me know, and I'll join you."

"What do you say?"

"If there is to be any capturing done, I want to do it single-handed."

"To the victor belongs the spoils,' you know."

"You'd better be sure of victory before you count on any spoils."

"That's so; but I don't want to brag; just you wait and I see."

"I can't see without waiting, so will have to be patient."

"But come in here and see what this old Indian wants—I can't make head or tail out of his gesticulations."

Entering, Gordon found an old chief standing inside, and the conversation that followed made Gordon yet more determined to continue his hunt.

For the old chief graphically told how he and a few companions, who were hunting, had suddenly come upon the bodies of two Creek warriors, laid out side by side, each one killed by a stab in the back, and bearing on their foreheads the same mysterious brand which ornamented the document that the boy had found pinned to the tree by a pointed stick that morning.

And relating this to the agent, the latter, in spite of his incredulity, admitted that there was something strange in the whole proceeding.

CHAPTER XV.

CAPTURING THE WILD HUNTER.

THE gaunt trunk of the huge tree, whence Gordon had seen the apparition appear, loomed huge and shadowy in the darkness as the hour of twelve drew near, on the succeeding night; and hidden in its branches, crouching along a large limb that overhung the rift in the trunk, lay the boy in waiting.

He had waited until all about the Agency were buried in slumber, and had then ridden out alone and without notifying any one of his intention.

Lying quietly, his form could not be distinguished in the gloom, and he patiently waited for the appearance of the Wild Hunter; while despite his courage he felt awed by the darkness and silence, yet determined to brave all dangers to pierce through the depths of the mystery which enveloped the weird stranger.

At length he heard a slight sound below him, and peering cautiously down, saw issue from the trunk of the tree through the opening in its side two huge gray wolves, which went sniffing about the tree and soon found his trail apparently, for they snarled suspiciously and, following the scent, came close up to the spot where he had climbed up, clawed the bark as high as they could reach, and then bayed loudly.

Gordon drew a little further back on the limb and

holding in his hands the noose of his lariat, leaned out over the rift and at that moment saw the stranger appear, a dim blue phosphorescent light playing about his head and adding to his ghastly and ghost-like appearance.

In an instant the noose fell noiselessly from above, and before the Wild Hunter realized what had happened, it tightened about his arms and he was drawn up, swinging into the air, powerless to release himself and uttering not a word.

As Gordon drew the antlered head close up to the limb on which he was now sitting astride, he fastened the end of the lariat which he held and then, drawing his knife, leaned down and severed the thongs which fastened the deer's antlers to the head of the Wild Hunter, and lifted the horns high in the air.

Then he spoke.

"You are now in my power, and you see that your warning was of no avail."

"Silence your four-footed companions,"—for the two wolves were howling tremendously, and leaping high in the air with gnashing teeth, endeavoring to reach the two above.

"Satan!—Dragon!—lie down!" commanded the hoarse voice of the captured stranger, and in an instant the two brutes crouched whimpering to the ground and lay quiet.

Then Gordon, taking a thong he had provided in case his plan was successful, leaned over again and tied the hands of the other firmly, after which he lifted him on the branch, close to the trunk and bound him to the tree.

For although the stranger was of an immense height, yet he was very slightly built, and his weight was as nothing in the strong arms of the young boy, although it could be plainly discerned on grasping him, that muscles of iron and sinews of steel lurked beneath his skin.

His face was drawn and haggard, and there lurked in his deep set eyes a baleful glare that was maniacal in its fury, while his unkempt hair and beard, floating in wild disorder, now that their fastenings were undone, added to his weird appearance.

"Now," said Gordon, "that I have you firmly secured I will return to the Agency and soon have you under arrest; unless indeed you will relate your history to me and what this disguise means."

"I owe it to you to inform you, for what you have done for my family—or rather attempted to do for them."

"What do you mean?"

"Listen, and I will tell you."

"I am the son of the old minister who was massacred by the Creek Indians not long since."

"I was returning home for a short visit on that fatal night, when, just as I was nearing the cabin I was felled from my horse by a crushing blow on the head, and for a moment lay insensible in the woods near the edge of the clearing or glade in which our little home was situated."

"I returned to consciousness just as you rode into the circle of light, cast by the burning building, and saw your face clearly."

"At that moment I also saw my father stretched out on the ground and an Indian, with uplifted tomahawk, about to brain my innocent sister."

And, his face bent down, he shuddered at the recollection of that fearful night.

But as Gordon was about to speak, he raised his eyes that were wet with tears and continued his narrative:

"I could not bear the awful sight—I sunk to the earth powerless to prevent the blow, for my rifle was gone and my pistols had been taken from me after I had been scalped."

"Yes," as an exclamation of horror sprung to his listener's lips while the lad, drawing his knife, cut the bonds which held the stranger:

"I have been scalped, and live to tell the tale!"

"But the awful scene that was transpiring before my very eyes, the terrible blow I had received, the

pain of my wounds and the loss of blood were too much for me and I again sunk back, unconscious.

"When I returned to my senses, the glade was deserted and nothing living remained in it, and crawling cautiously out I approached carefully and found the dead body of my father, scorching near the yet smoldering embers of our former home.

"Of my sister there was no trace, yet, searching in the ashes, I found a few charred bones, which I am sure were hers, as the savages undoubtedly flung her yet warm body into the flames.

"For I know you were not in time—No! do not speak yet—and then what could you do alone against that howling mob of red demons?

"And, after burying them in one common grave, I knelt beside the mound and lifting my hand to high heaven, swore that I would devote my life to vengeance, and that all my future days should be passed in wreaking my revenge on the Creeks.

"I had heard the story or legend of the Wild Hunter and determined to adopt this disguise, the better to further my schemes—and it has worked well.

"Their superstitious fears are instantly aroused whenever I appear, and they do not stop to defend themselves, but invariably seek safety in flight, my good horse easily overtaking them—while a little sulphur and phosphorus adds to their fears and a woven vest of steel-links turns their knife-thrusts and leaves me unhurt.

"Now, that I have told you all, you will not betray me—and I am not now at your mercy—I am unbound and free, and live only for vengeance! vengeance!"

But as he fairly shrieked out the last words with a yell that would have chilled the blood of a less courageous hearer, Gordon spoke:

"You have something else to live for!"

"Your sister is alive and well, and demands your care.

"She did not perish on that fatal night; but was rescued by me, unhurt."

"What!" screamed the maniac, for such Gordon now realized he was.

"My sister alive! oh! where is she?—where is she?—tell me, I beg."

And he broke into a storm of tears, the reaction being so great, but was calmed and quieted in a few moments and able to listen to Gordon.

And in a short time the lad had explained how he had been able to rescue the girl and how the bones the other had found must be those of the Indian who was about to tomahawk her, and which were so charred as to leave but a few fragments.

And the stranger—the Wild Hunter no longer—almost fell on Gordon's neck and kissed him, so grateful was he for the daring rescue he had succeeded in making.

And then they descended from the tree, the supposed wolves growling menacingly at Gordon as he approached, but being quickly quieted by their master, who, cutting sundry fastenings, relieved them of their covering of wolf-skins and left them standing there, two large, powerful deer-hounds, which had been thus disguised to aid in the deception.

Entering the rift in the trunk, the stranger stooped and pulled on a huge root which seemed firmly imbedded in the earth, but, much to Gordon's surprise, it raised up easily, leaving an opening through which they both dropped into a sort of a cell below, hewn out of the earth, and where was a rude couch and sundry other evidences of habitation.

Gathering up a few traps, the ex-hunter caught hold of a chain hanging from above, and clambered once more into the trunk of the tree, followed by Gordon, and, closing the opening which led below, they went out into the open air and were soon on their way to the Agency, reaching it before day-break and entering Gordon's quarters unseen.

Here a pair of scissors and a razor soon produced a marked change in the wild appearance of the

visitor, yet the glare did not entirely leave his eyes and Gordon realized that he was insane.

The boy then hunted up the surgeon of the Agency and he, coming, administered a soothing draught to Robie, for such was the visitor's name, and he soon fell into a deep slumber, during which the surgeon examined him and found that a small piece of his skull, crushed in by the blow of the tomahawk, pressed against his brain.

Calling his assistant and procuring a case of his instruments, he deftly performed an operation, lifting the piece of bone up and bandaging it, so that when, in a few hours, Robie awoke, his mind was clear, and his head gave him no more trouble.

And in a few days more, completely restored to health, he set out for the East where his sister was, clothed and in his right mind.

And not long after Gordon received a long letter from him in which he renewed his thanks, joined those of his sister, whom he had found, to his own, and stated that he intended to study for the ministry and return among the Indians to take the place his father had occupied before him.

And as time wore on the legend of the Wild Hunter became only a legend; but the superstition of the Indians kept them away from the fatal tree, to which Gordon often rode, accompanied by the two hounds Robie had presented to him before leaving.

He told the whole story to the agent, and he in turn repeated it so that Gordon was praised on all sides for his courage.

But the Indians placed no faith in his statement, and adhered firmly to their former belief.

CHAPTER XVI.

ADOPTING A DISGUISE.

DURING the famous Creek outbreak, when so many inoffensive persons were massacred in cold blood by the Indians, Gordon was actively engaged in different capacities; acting now as scout; now as courier and again as messenger to the tribe.

Learning of the presence of some of the tribe in the neighborhood, he, with two of his young Indian companions, left the Agency one bright morning, and started out to reconnoiter in the direction of the supposed camp.

The snow lay deep on the ground and they started on foot, thinking that they could proceed with more precaution and with less likelihood of discovery than if they took their horses with them, and traveled all that day at a pace which would not seem possible to a dweller in the city.

About sunset they reached a tall bluff which overhung a swift running stream, the rapid waters of which had remained unfrozen.

A vast plain lay before them, on the other side of the stream, and as they stood and looked, the darkness came down upon them, and as the landscape became indistinct in the gloom, the sparkle of a camp-fire on the other side of the river, broke out on the night, and seemed so close that it almost appeared possible to pitch a stone into it; yet it was nearly a mile away.

Drawing his belt closer about him Gordon started down the least precipitous side of the bluff, in order to cross the river and, approaching as near the camp-fire as he could, learn what manner of person it was who had thus bivouacked for the night.

Followed by the Indians he stealthily approached the sparkling light, crawling through a growth of underbrush as carefully as the panther steals on his prey, until, finally, they lay close to the grouped band of Indians and could distinctly hear every word they uttered.

And there they lay and listened to the talk of the Indians, gathering information which, spread far and wide, prevented a massacre which would have bathed many a home in blood and caused a weeping and a sorrow through the length and breadth of the Territory.

After lying quiet for some time, scarcely daring to breathe for fear of being overheard, the three withdrew as cautiously as they had come and, circling around the camp, started off over the plain again, to see if any other bands were in the vicinity, and wandering far from the river, found that a half-dozen other fires dotted the prairie, and betokened the presence of many warriors.

And suddenly day broke upon them, before they were aware of its approach, and they realized that they were in deadly peril, and must trust to their swiftness of limb, as well as their cunning, to escape from the toils which encompassed them.

So they hurried off on their return, and, rapidly approaching the river, ran plump into a band of a half dozen savages, who were wandering about with no definite purpose.

The surprise was mutual, and they stood gazing at each other for a moment, and then Gordon, turning sharply to the right, plunged into a thicket that stretched far toward the river, and, followed by his two companions, disappeared, while the mounted band skurried after them, howling like a pack of demons.

And so the chase swept on, until finally, the pursuers arriving within gun-shot, fired, and one of the Indians fell headlong to the ground, shot through the hip, while Gordon and his remaining companion turned, blazed back defiance at their pursuers with two shots that brought death to one of the Creeks and sent another tumbling to the ground, his horse having been shot beneath him.

A short run across an open plain, and then, as they were about to plunge into the woods which lined the banks of the stream, another volley hissed after them from the following horsemen, and the other Indian stumbled and fell, sorely wounded, while Gordon, as by a miracle, remained unhurt.

Stopping an instant, he turned and lifted his friend, throwing the body across his shoulders with a marvelous strength, and then, plunging into the grove, realized that, for the moment, he was safe; for the Indians would not approach the timber and expose themselves to his fire, preferring to wait until he should start to swim the stream and then riddle him at their leisure.

Dodging from trunk to trunk of the huge trees which lined the bank, and still carrying his companion, Gordon at length reached the edge of the grove and stood upon the bank of the stream.

A small log lay on the ground near by, and, rolling this down into the water, three feet below, he stepped down, placed the Indian on the log, laid his revolvers on the trunk of the small tree he was thus utilizing as a raft, and pushed off, drifting down the river with the current and being hidden from their pursuers by the steep bank, so that, before the Creeks suspected it, Gordon and his rescued companion were a mile away, and nearing the bank on the other shore.

But they did not land there, for they were drifting in the direction of the Agency, and although chilled to the bone, Gordon determined to stick to the river as long as he could, until finally they were forced to abandon it and land, when Gordon built a small shelter for the Indian with boughs and twigs, and then lighting a fire, made him as comfortable as possible, when he started off for the Agency on foot in search of help.

It was a long tramp, and he was well-nigh tired out, but he pushed on and reached the village some time before dark, and immediately informed the wounded Indian's brothers of his condition; upon which they, taking ponies and blankets, set out to his relief, while the unwearying lad began his preparations for another journey, the object being to rescue his Indian brother, who was a prisoner in the hands of the Creeks.

Robie had left with him not only his dogs but also the magnificent black horse he had always ridden as well as the costume he had assumed when setting out on his errands of vengeance, and leading

his own animal, riding the black and followed by the hounds, Gordon started off in the direction of the Creek camp, carrying a large bundle on the saddle before him.

He rode fast and furiously, and knowing exactly where he was going, shortened the distance considerably by taking a straight course, crossing the river some distance below the camp, and, as he drew near, stopping and dismounting and fastening the two horses to a tree near by.

The night was well advanced and he feared that he might be too late, yet he hastened his preparations as much as possible, hoping that he might arrive in time and save his friend's life, and his arrangements being fully completed, he rode boldly toward the Creek camp, leaving the led horse tied to the tree where he had first stopped.

When Night Owl fell, he was rapidly reached by the band of pursuing Creeks and, two of them stopping, he was soon made prisoner and firmly secured by thongs fastened about hands and feet, and carried back to the camp, where the arrival of his captors was hailed with enthusiasm, all rejoicing over the capture of the spy.

The wound he had received had not disabled him much, although the shock had sent him headlong to the turf, and the bleeding once stopped, he was comparatively a well man, and able to undergo any tortures inflicted upon him with the stoical endurance characteristic of the Indian who disdains to give way to any exhibition of pain.

And soon the rest of the band returned, mad with rage and disappointment at the escape of the other two who had succeeded in eluding them, and with wild cries they demanded that Night Owl should be put to the torture.

And this proposition was hailed with delight on all sides, while preparations were quickly made for the final tragedy in the captured man's life.

The body of the dead Indian was placed before him as he stood bound to a tree, and the Indian orators began their high-flown speeches, alluding to the bravery of the dead man, and endeavoring by all the means in their power to arouse the wrath of the captured man, but without success; for he realized that the utmost gratification he could afford them would be to give way to an outburst of rage—this being the end for which they were striving.

But at length they exhausted their insulting vocabulary, and, his feet and hands being unbound, while he was closely guarded that he might not escape, he was led toward the camp-fire which burned brightly in the center of the glade and there again fastened to a huge tree, while the Creek warriors began their fiendish tortures.

To speak of the various means they resorted to, in order to wring from him an exclamation of pain would be useless repetition; the story has been told over and over again until it has become a too-familiar one.

Suffice it to say that in a short time his body presented a terrible appearance, so gashed, so scarred, so burned and blistered was it, although he had not as yet received any fatal wound.

At length, as his courage remained unshaken, and despite the most excruciating pain inflicted on him, he had not given one sign of weakness, but continued to gaze sneeringly and contemptuously on his tormentors, they prepared to exercise their skill in throwing the tomahawk with the Indian as a mark; the object being to come as close as possible to him without inflicting a wound.

Drawing lots for precedence, the Indians formed themselves in a line, and Night Owl, seeing that a brother of the dead man stood third, made up his mind that he would soon cease to suffer, as this relative would surely seize this opportunity for vengeance, and crush out his life by a skillful throw of his keen-bladed hatchet.

Stepping forward, the first of the Creeks drew back his arm and sent his tomahawk twisting and whizzing through the air until the blade struck the

trunk with a thud that shook it and buried itself deep, while a cry of approbation arose—the edge had grazed Night Owl's ear, barely scratching it, and proving the skill of the warrior.

The second thrower's ax went wide of the mark, and he retired discomfited amid the jeers of his companions; when the third, he who would surely kill the prisoner, stepped out, poised his tomahawk lightly in his hand, surveyed his victim—who looked scornfully at him—with a sneering smile, and leaping forward, sent the deadly missile whizzing toward the tree.

But at the moment he latched it a wild yell disconcerted his aim, and the ax flew harmlessly by Night Owl, while a thundering tread was heard, and a tall, weird horseman, breathing fire and smoke, and bearing on his head a huge pair of antlers, sped into the glade, while, amid a cry of—

"The Wild Hunter!"

the Creeks scattered and fled in every direction, while the rider, cutting the bonds that bound the prisoner, drew him up behind him, and in a moment more disappeared.

Gordon had saved his friend.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WHOLESALE THEFT.

WHEN they rode into the Agency the Indian was so weak that he could scarcely sit his horse, and Gordon had to support him and aid him to dismount, but he was soon made comfortable, and related the story of the boy's courage and daring, so that Gordon soon became a greater hero than ever.

By his request the rescued man did not go into particulars regarding the disguise that had proven so effective, as Gordon did not wish the story to become too widely circulated, preferring rather to let the Creeks remain in ignorance of the true solution of the problem; for he knew that the story would spread and perhaps interfere with any plans he might conceive in the future.

So he carefully locked away the different articles he had received from Robie and kept his own counsel, while the Night Owl promised strict silence on his part, and as none of the Creeks ventured near the Agency, the tale of the night's rescue was, for a time at least, thoroughly believed.

Kept up by various duties during all the next day, when night came Gordon was completely tired out, and seeking his quarters was soon sound asleep, buried in a profound and dreamless slumber that lasted for hours.

But suddenly his rest became disturbed as with a nightmare and, after rolling and tossing about for some time he awakened and sprung up in bed and listened intently.

There was a choking sensation in his throat and he noticed a queer smell like smoke from a burning building, while the sound of cries and exclamations came to his ears.

Springing to his feet, he hurriedly dressed and hastened outside, when a bright glare burst out over the entire scene spread before him and a volume of smoke and sparks drove him back from where he was standing, the wind blowing directly toward him from the burning mass.

Not far from where he stood was a large corral, or pen for horses, and on one side of this stood a huge stack of hay. The corral contained two or three hundred head of horses, belonging to the Agency, and was built of stout logs set into the ground and supporting cross-pieces of lighter timber.

But now, in the full glare of the blazing hay, Gordon could see that there remained not one horse in the inclosure, and that the fire was rapidly increasing, the sparks driving toward the village and threatening to set fire to the houses.

And a thundering, rolling sound of hoof-beats came to him from over the prairie, as the frightened

herd swept away, urged on in their mad flight by yells and cries and the cracking of whips; while he realized that a raid had been made by the horse-thieves, and that every animal in the village had been stolen, leaving no means of pursuit, and that the raiders had fired the stack that the flames might threaten the village and occupy the attention of all persons about the Agency.

They could thus get well on their way to the north, and then dividing up into smaller bands, scatter to east and west and dispose of their booty to any one who might wish to buy and who was not too particular with his questions relating to the seller's antecedents.

Instantly comprehending the situation, Gordon raised his fingers to his lips and blew a long, shrill whistle which might have been heard a mile away, over the prairie, and at the same moment an answering neigh came back to him and shortly his horse—the black one given him by Robie, came galloping to his side.

Hastily mounting and entirely unarmed as he was, he hurried away on a dead run, after the fleeing herd, and rapidly overtaking them joined in the chase, yelling as loudly as any of the others and, the darkness being intense, evidently mistaken by them for one of the band.

And so they swept on until the glare in the sky from the burning corral lay far behind them, and Gordon was still unrecognized; but came to the conclusion that if anything was to be done, it must be accomplished soon, as day would soon break and his identity and non-membership of the band be exposed.

But how to proceed he knew not, for there were at least twenty of the men who would surely shoot him without a moment's notice if they discovered that he was a stranger; so riding up alongside of one of them, he endeavored to learn, without betraying himself, where they were going, and how soon they would stop.

And in this he was successful, for the other, apparently not familiar with the lay of the country where they were, and mistaking Gordon for one of his friends, addressed him:

"Say, Curt," he began, "how fur is it ter Little Greasy, anyhow?"

"Whar from?" rejoined Gordon, making his voice as gruff as possible, and using the Western dialect as well as he could.

"'Whar frum,' ye blessed ijut! whar d'ye suppose from?"

"Hanged ef I know."

"W'y frum Pawnee, in course."

"Wal, why didn't yer say so?"

"Buffer Springs air seventeen mile from Pawnee, an' Little Greasy air three mile from Buffer Springs."

"Does yer know enuff 'rithmetik ter kalkerlate a little problem in mathermatiks?"

"Cert! twenty mile; an' we've come about five."

"Ef ther Cap don' stop purty soon I'll—"

What was to follow this last remark is forever lost to history, for Gordon, seeing that they were well separated from the rest of the band, leaned over as if to fix his boot, and riding close to the other caught him suddenly by the leg and tossed him far over on the other side of his horse before the desperado realized what he was about to do, and the man lay stunned while the rest swept on unnoticed this little by-play.

And still riding close to the other horse, Gordon removed the saddle and bridle and placed them on his own steed—a matter of no little difficulty at full gallop—for he had been riding bare-back and with no saddle.

But in his difficult task he was aided by the intelligence of the noble animal which carried him and was soon seated in a handsome saddle and holding the lines of a plated bridle that was profusely adorned with silver ornaments.

He soon saw that his horse was far speedier than

any of the others and, knowing how a herd will follow the bell, determined to put an idea he had conceived into execution.

His other horse, which was galloping along with the herd, had a bell, fastened by a strap to his neck; but it was deadened by having a cloth tied about the clapper, for when the horses were in the corral the bell was not needed and was only used when they were turned out to graze over the prairie; for, in the broken country a man might pass near them, when looking for the herd, and not be aware that they were in the vicinity.

And the herd will always follow their leader as a flock of sheep does the bell-wether, so accustomed are they to this usage.

Urging his horse, therefore, into the midst of the herd, he, as the animals scattered and allowed him to pass, uttered, at intervals, a low cry of a peculiar nature, with which he was accustomed to call his horse to him, and was soon rewarded by hearing a low whinny of recognition in answer, and, drawing near the sound, he saw his favorite, distinguished from the rest by his silvery mane and tail.

Urging his horse close to the galloping animal, he bent over, and in a moment, unbuckled the strap which held the bell, and fastening it around the neck of the horse he was riding, he again spurred on until he was a little ahead of the herd, when he unmuffled the clapper and the tinkling chime rung out loud and clear in the direction of the sound.

And then he urged his horse on to a more furious pace, and as the bell rung its signal the herd, sweeping onward like the wind, gradually converged toward the point where he was riding and followed as one animal.

Swerving off to the left he drew the band of horses after him and despite the shouts, the oaths and the cries of the horse-thieves, they followed steadily on and describing a huge circle, at length struck off straight toward the camp, rapidly drawing away from the thieves whose horses, tired and bearing the weight of their owners, could not keep up with the riderless steeds.

And so they faded away from the sight of their pursuers who gradually abandoned the chase; all but one, their leader, believing that there was no advantage to be gained in following the herd any further.

But their leader, magnificently mounted, and

boiling with rage at thus seeing his magnificent booty snatched from his very hands by some mysterious agency, spurred on and on, finally being rewarded by hearing the roll of the horses' hoofs sound less rapidly on the frozen ground, as Gordon, believing that he had left the band of horse-thieves far in the rear, gradually drew rein and slackened his pace.

But the quick ear of the lad soon caught sound of the rattling of a curb-chain, and realized that one of the men was still in pursuit, so galloping quietly along, he slid down alongside his horse, and with one hand grasping the bell, to silence it, ran alongside his horse for a couple of hundred yards.

And as the pursuer approached, the boy could see his form outlined against the sky, while the other, seeing that the horse alongside which he was, was saddled, drew his revolver and fired straight at the head of the black.

But at that moment his horse threw his head high in the air, and received the bullet through one of his ears, and, snorting with pain, he bounded violently in the air, and, unseating his rider, threw him to the ground, where he was speedily crushed into an undistinguishable mass by the hoofs of the galloping herd.

And Gordon, as the other horses, frightened by the report of the revolver, came madly on, again leaped into the saddle, and allowed the bell to ring again, and soon rode into the Agency, followed by all of the stolen horses, which were soon safely corraled, the fire having been extinguished before it had materially injured the fence.

CONCLUSION.

Gordon remained for some little time longer in the Nation and continued to occupy the post of interpreter until the summer of 1883 when he left the Indian Territory and joined Hon. W. F. Cody's "Buffalo Bill Wild West" Combination and is still with them.

He is the same quiet, retiring, unassuming man that he always has been, and makes friends wherever he goes among all with whom he becomes associated.

He is still young, and is destined to make his mark in the world in whatever line of life he may be found, and if good wishes can bring him success, he will surely achieve it.

THE END.

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